BLUEPRINT

Issue 7 | Volume 85 | March 2025

Green Hills, Great Schools

Table Of Contents

Scan the QR Code to contact us through Blueprint *Online*

NEWS

2 - Library Events
4 - The Princess Project
6 - Color Run
8 - News Briefs
9 - DEIB Debrief

FEATURE

Extra-School Activities - 12
World Watch -16
Local Government Briefs - 18
Connelly's Corner -19
Measure T - 20

Behind the scenes of cover's art

Dear *Blueprint* Reader,

In designing the cover, it is our goal to capture the ideas of Blueprint articles effectively by portraying the pieces visually. For this issue's cover on Model T, we debated on how best to capture the story's content. We chose to incorporate real maps and records of Lafayette in a design encapsulating its history and original ideas. After a trip to the Lafayette Public Library and Lafayette Historical Society, we found maps, land grants, blueprints, and more dating back to the 1940's.

After taking photos of anything on paper we could find, we decided that a mixed-media cover would be the best way to go. Making sure the visual included the theme of funding, an origami $100 bill in the shape of a graduation cap shows the funding every student requires as they move through the Lafayette school system. The specific Parcel map we used shows the long standing support of acalanes as it is emphasized in maps dating back to its founding.

To see more of our graphics from the cover story, turn to page 20.

Sof Cerruti, Justin Rosenblatt, Cade McAlister, and Bo Chevaleau | Senior Graphics Editors, Head of Photography, and Head of Graphics

Letter from the Editors

Dear *Blueprint* Reader,

We are thrilled to share *Blueprint's* seventh issue of Volume 85. This issue, *Blueprint* highlights many student initiatives and successes, including the Princess Project, extra-school hobbies, and the historic runs of women's winter sports athletes. *Blueprint* also covers many local events including the Color Run, the Art Embraces Poetry Women's History Month open-mic night, and Lafayette Library educational speaker events.

In our cover story, *Blueprint* examines the implications of Measure T, a $130 parcel tax that would increase school funding for the Acalanes Union High School District, which Lafayette residents will vote on in the special election May 6. The measure rose amidst concerns over the District's budget deficit and intentions to maintain existing programs while continuing the effort to improve educational opportunities within the District. *Blueprint* spoke to district and on-site administration to understand projected impacts of where remaining and changing levels of District's funding could take Acalanes material, teacher, and sports resources.

Finally, we want to say a heartfelt thank you to our advisors, our wonderful *Blueprint* staff, and of course, our readers, as this is our last issue as Print Editors-in-Chief. We look forward to seeing where our new leadership staff will take the paper in Issue 8 and next year. It has been a privilege to lead *Blueprint* this past year. We have deeply valued the opportunity to guide the next generation of *Blueprint* journalists in their journeys in using the press as the Fourth Estate to uplift voices in the community.

As always, to submit a response to any story within our paper, scan the QR code to submit a letter to the editor through *Blueprint* Online. Please refer to the bottom of the Table of Contents for *Blueprint's* mission statement. We hope you enjoy this issue of *Blueprint* and look forward to sharing more stories in the future.

Maya Agarwal & Avery Robb | Print Editors-in-Chief

Blueprint strives to uplift voices in our community with truth and transpaency.

OPINION

36 - Mental Health Crisis
38 - Perfectionism in Relationships
39 - Ethics Curriculum
41 - Translating for Family
42 - Take Action

SPORTS

Women's Sports Successes - 44
Pregame Rituals - 46
Editorial: Transgender People in Sports - 47
Sports Beats - 48
Athlete of the Issue - 52

Crossword - 51

ARTS

24 - Poetry Event
25 - Quote of the Issue
26 - Book Nook
27 - Spring Play
28 - Artist of the Issue
29 - Recipe of the Issue
30 - Ruebners Records
31 - La Mode
32 - Local Public Art

Words Worth Hearing

The Lafayette Library hosts educational speakers

Mila Ellis, Maddie Obertello, and Audrey Tugade | Staff Writers

Photos by Cade McAlister and Audrey Tugade

From microbes in cheese to the art of crafting, innovation turns everyday skills into remarkable expertise. The Lafayette Library and Learning Center Foundation (LLLCF) highlighted three speakers to enhance the community's understanding of health and creativity.

The LLLCF hosted microbiologist Rachel Dutton, who shared her findings about microorganisms that live on varieties of cheese on March 11. The same week on March 13, Kelly Corrigan, accompanied by her daughter Claire Corrigan-Litchy, spoke about the importance of "making" in everyday life.

The LLLCF hosted these events as part of a larger initiative, organizing various educational events throughout the year for the community. The two events help celebrate the LLLCF fifteenth anniversary's Health, Wellness, and Aging Series, where the library aims to present a series of programs, designed to engage, inform and entertain the community.

"I think that the fact that we have a lot of these events at the library definitely brings the community together. I've done like a bunch of other stuff at the library and I do think that [these events] are very helpful, very fun, and very engaging," attendee Isaiah Sarzet said

Rachel Dutton

Working in various cheese labs across the country, Dutton specializes in the intersections of fermented foods, open science, and open health. She currently works as a scientist at the Astera Institute. Coming to The LLLCF, Dutton aimed to educate her listeners on the complex process of cheese fermentation and explain the different flavor profiles in her favorite cheeses.

"My background [is] not in food, but I love food, and so I was interested in studying microbes. [I] realized that [microbes] were really complex and [that] food-associated microbiomes and preserved foods are much simpler. So I actually started based on the idea that we could study fermented food microbiomes as a sort of model system," Dutton said.

During her presentation, Dutton emphasized how the role of specific bacteria and molds in cheese development allows for a more precise control over cheese flavor profiles and texture. She delved into the different types of bacteria and how they create the distinct characteristics of cheese, such as propionibacterium on Swiss cheese, which creates cheese holes.

"My hope is that [the attendees had] maybe a little bit more understanding and appreciation of the microbial world and the really amazing things that microbes do, and that when we eat a piece of cheese, we're eating this living ecosystem," Dutton said.

Juliana Uruburu, Head Cheesemonger at Rockridge Market Hall, joined Dutton at the event and shared her own expertise in the world of cheese and its various classifications. Both Uruburu and Dutton hoped their presentation inspired attendees to explore beyond their usual choices, gaining a deeper understanding of the complex topic.

"I hope people [had] a wonderful night out. I hope that they [learned] more about different cheese classifications, and that they feel more comfortable branching out within these classifications of cheese and try more cheese," Uruburu said.

Community members also appreciated Dutton's approach to cheese as more than just scientific, as Dutton provided attendees with cheese to taste.

"I think having these events is really important for the community and it's a really great way to bridge different demographics of people. This is a very versatile event and not really specific to one group of people, it was really unifying," LLCF Social Media Manager Ada Ogu said.

As an overall goal for the presentation, Dutton aimed for the audience to gain a new understanding of fermented foods and their health benefits.

"My role right now is trying to actually understand how to make it easier for people to eat more fermented foods so they can get the health benefits of all of the different bioactive molecules that the microbes are making," Dutton said.

Kelly Corrigan and Claire Corrigan-Litchy

Mother-daughter duo Kelly Corrigan

and Claire Corrigan-Litchy also spoke at the Lafayette Library as part of their book reading tour. They highlighted the importance and benefits of interactive and immersive creativity, or what they call "making." Beyond hosting events, "making" plays a large role in the duo's personal life, something they have incorporated into their daily routines.

"I use 'making' as a tool to help me stay focused and also to give me a little cognitive relief throughout the day. So I often have something happening on my dining room table, either a puzzle or a painting project or some kind of knitting or crochet, and when I need a break from work, that's where I go," Corrigan said.

Corrigan and Corrigan-Litchy explained the benefits of engaging in hands-on, creative activities in everyday life, such as increased well-being from serotonin and dopamine. They also advocated for the inclusion of varied electives in school curricula, such as home economics, art courses, and creative problem-solving activities in hopes of introducing and exposing creativity into more lives.

"I hope that [the audience] takes the idea of creative problem-solving seriously as a fundamental part of every day, for every person, young and old. I also hope to offer an expanded definition of what we mean by 'making.' Robotics is 'making,' all engineering is 'making,' woodworking and shop class, and then the things that people always think of, like knitting or painting or writing, sonnets and limericks and stand-up routines. I hope that they remember some experience of their own and possibly recommit to it," Corrigan said.

Lafayette Library and Learning Center Foundation
Art & Science of Food Series Presents
Cheese Fermentation
Rachel Dutton, PhD
with
Juliana Uruburu, Market Hall
One (1) Cheese plate per guest.
The cheese samples and tasting are part of tonight's presentation.
I Made Here

During their presentation, the pair read and acted out their new children's book, *Marianne the Maker.* The book promoted creativity and invention in children. Looking towards the future, they hope to develop their work further by promoting creativity from different angles.

"My mom and I ... [have] loved creating the character of Marianne and we would love to have her become a series of books. We're also really interested in exploring a television series so creating a pilot and making a show to help not only entertain kids but help them access creativity and ways that are maybe less conventional than just finger painting," Corrigan-Litchy said.

Throughout the presentation, Corrigan and Corrigan-Litchy both shared their own personal stories, insights, and experiences. Their discussion showcased their collaboration as a pair.

"I was amazed at how much [Corrigan-Litchy] had to say about everything. She really had her own viewpoint very strongly, and very validly. It really came across [that the] mother and her daughter [were not just] a pair but that they were really colleagues," LLLCF Board of Trustees Secretary and attendee Judy Kirkpatrick said.

According to Corrigan and Corrigan-Litchy, their mother and daughter relationship contributes to their success, providing a unique dynamic and sense of familiarity during collaboration.

"Getting to experience [the presentation] firsthand just increases the amount of respect I have for her by so much because not only is she a great mom, but she's really so capable, and getting to work with her creatively is such a joy," Corrigan-Litchy said.

Events at the LLLCF such as Dutton's, Corrigan's, and Corrigan-Litchy's, can provide opportunities for the younger generation in the Lafayette community to learn more about different topics.

"I think it is most important for our younger people. Unfortunately, most of the people who come are older people. But this is a wonderful opportunity for younger people to really learn a lot about what's going on in the community in which they live in and why it's going on and how it matters to live. And I would love to see a lot more younger people coming to these," attendee Lloyd Powell said.

Dresses for Dreams

Acalanes' prom dress drive for The Princess Project

Mila Ellis and Audrey Tugade | Staff Writers

Spread by Cade McAlister

A dress may be worn for only one night, but its impact can last a lifetime. For many high school students across California, The Princess Project helps make that dream a reality.

The Acalanes Environmental Board held a prom dress and accessory drive from Feb. 10 to March 29 in collaboration with The Princess Project, a California-based nonprofit organization that focuses on providing clothes and accessories to those in need.

The Princess Project has several locations across California, with boutiques located in both Northern and Southern California. At the boutiques, shoppers try on a variety of dresses and accessories, similar to a traditional prom dress shop. The Acalanes initiative donates their dresses to the San Francisco boutique, located on 455 Market St.

Kristi Smith Knutson and Laney Whitcanack founded the program in 2002. The project began while volunteering at an organization's high school youth program before eventually flourishing into its own nonprofit organization.

"[A girl in the program] said that it was really tough for her parents to even afford for her to get her cap and gown for graduation ... so she wasn't going to prom because it was too expensive. So I sent an email to 40 or 50 people and when I checked a couple days later, all of these people said that they wanted to contribute. We [realized] quickly that there might be more of a need than what we had originally thought," The Princess Project Co-Founder Laney Whitcanack said.

A key part of the nonprofit lies in the shopper's experience. Volunteers strive to give shoppers an inclusive and authentic experience, in both buying dresses and other accessories.

"We set it up as a boutique and we set it [with] sizes from 00 to size 30 with [different] colors so it looks like an actual shopping boutique. Everybody has to set an appointment, they come in and get a certain amount of time to pull some dresses and then ... they go in, they can try on the dresses. We have a bunch of jewelry that's donated and we [also] have handbags. It's like an entire shopping experience," The Princess Project Community Outreach Director Dawn Schadek said.

At Acalanes, junior Jordan Huskins first partnered with The Princess Project for Leadership's prom dress drive in 2024. The Environmental Board has continued these efforts this year.

"We were trying to figure out what organization to donate to for the prom dress drive last year, and I reached out to The Princess Project and they were super supportive. They are really a great organization and they all really care about the [shoppers] that get dresses from there," Huskins said.

Last year, Huskins promoted the drive using social media and inspected the donations prior to donating. Acalanes collected donations at several locations throughout the school and Lafayette by using collection bins.

"I set up bins, one at the community center and one at the front office last year. I made flyers and social media posts to get people to donate them, and email them. Once I got the dresses, I counted them and made sure they [had] the standards of what we [were] asking for," Huskins said.

Relying on community engagement to gather sources, The Princess Project receives donations from several stores and businesses, as well as school and community drives.

"Macy's will donate [and] we'll get a lot of dresses from bridal shops. But like Acalanes [Leadership] actually [does] a huge dress drive," Schadek said. "The community comes together pretty much like that. The community knows what the needs are and everybody puts together their resources."

The Princess Project aims to ensure no student misses out on events like prom due to financial barriers. By receiving donations, the organization provides shoppers with formal dresses and accessories to attend special experiences such as prom, with confidence.

"No one should have to miss out on such a special night because they can't afford a dress. These nonprofits ensure that every student has the opportunity to feel beautiful and included, which is so important," Junior Class Vice President Stella Pacheco said.

ZAHRA
BOUTIQUE SALON

ZAHRA
BOUTIQUE SALON

GARBO
GRAPHICS

- Promotional Products
- Corporate Apparel
- Drinkware
- Graphic Design
- Printed Products
- Inventory and Distribution

Contact us at:
415-592-7786
info@garbo.graphics

www.garbo.graphics

apricity
BY KIMBERLEY HARRISON
INDULGE YOUR DESIGN DREAMS
We invite you to explore Apricity, a curated selection of home decor and custom furnishings to elevate your space.
Follow us @apricityshoppe
71 Lafayette Circle, Lafayette, CA | 925.298.5381 | www.apricityshoppe.com

Painting the Pavement: Acalanes Color Run

Acalanes celebrates Holi with its fifth annual color run

Emily Roberts and Grace Wolpert | Print Feature Editor and Arts Copy Editor

Photos by Emily Roberts and Grace Wolpert

Spread by Molly Jones

Bright clouds of pink, blue, and yellow fill the air as students lace up their shoes for the annual Acalanes Color Run. With each step, vibrant colors coat runners, turning the participants' white jerseys into a muddled rainbow.

Acalanes Sophomore and Junior Class Officers organized the event, which took place on March 16, to celebrate the Hindu Festival Holi and promote school spirit. Holi, which occurred on March 14 this year, is also known as the Festival of Colors because those celebrating toss colorful powder at each other to welcome the arrival of spring and to celebrate love and new beginnings. Because of its celebration, the Color Run drew inspiration from the festival.

The Color Run featured a one-mile and two-mile loop through the Acalanes campus, where leadership students splashed vibrant colors at participants at different checkpoints. Whether it was through running, walking, or cheering from the sidelines, the Color Run provided participants with a day of energy and fun.

"This event has been hosted at Acalanes since I was a little kid. It is a great way to get the community together, raise money for our classes, celebrate Holi, and spread spirit among the community," Sophomore Vice President Grace Eppinger said.

Sophomore and junior class officers plan and facilitate the event each year, finding sponsors and overseeing the general organization of the run.

"We have to get sponsors each year to sponsor a minimum of 300 dollars. We also have to make sure we have all of the supplies we need, such as powder and other things. We have to get prizes for the raffle and we go to different games to get people to sign up," Junior Vice President Stella Pacheco said.

Community outreach is a main focus when organizing the event, as well as spreading the word of the Color Run through school visits and showing up to other community events.

"We've been to every elementary school which is super fun. They have allowed us to be a part of their morning meeting assemblies and we've visited weekend baseball and weekend football to try and spread the word, and just a lot of online publicity to encourage people to register," Activities Director Katherine Walton said.

At the event, those participating were provided with treats and the opportunity to adorn themselves in color. The runners had the opportunity to connect with the community through a bonding activity, while getting decorated with a unique array of colors.

"My favorite part of the Color Run was the start and the finish of the race, and I liked all the stations with the colors," Springhill Elementary student Brooks Svenson said.

Not only can the Color Run provide entertainment, it also serves as an opportunity to meet new people while celebrating the cheerful holiday.

"It is a great way to bring our community together, celebrate the Hindu holiday, Holi, and motivate everyone to get a little bit of exercise," Eppinger said.

News Briefs

Short Play Festival

Audrey Tugade | Staff Writer

The Acalanes DramaDons hosted the annual Short Play Festival in the small theater on March 27 and 28. Acalanes juniors and seniors directed and wrote different plays, which were performed by themselves and fellow Acalanes drama students.

The students first started preparing for the plays in February with auditions. The different sets were made by the stagecraft class, which included common set pieces that rotate between shows. The Drama class organized the different set pieces and props into a variety of formations for each of the different plays.

Unlike other plays and musicals put on by the drama program, these short plays are mainly student-led. Acalanes drama students did their own hair and makeup for the shows, used costumes from previous productions, or provided their own costumes.

The drama program performed a total of eight plays, which they put on throughout the day. The plays consisted of several genres such as coming of age, supernatural, apocalyptic, and comedy. Teachers brought their classes to watch the shows during the school day alongside other staff members.

Talent Show

Tselmeg Orgilmunkh | Staff Writer

Students waited backstage on March 18, waiting to showcase their talents at the Acalanes Performing Arts Center for the talent show. On March 19, the event occurred again during Academy, allowing more students to watch.

Leadership organized the event, hoping to foster an environment that highlights and appreciates students' talents while building a sense of community. The Associated Student Body sent out a Google Form inviting students to sign up and perform. This year, the annual event consisted of 26 students and ten acts, with seniors *Jake Colaco and Brady Quinn hosting. As hosts, they introduced each act, made jokes, and engaged with the audience in hopes of serving as additional entertainment.

Behind the scenes, stagecraft's lights and sound crew programmed colorful visuals and ran sound aiming to enhance performances. They managed the microphones, backing tracks, audios, attended rehearsals to set up sound cues, and utilized lighting for visuals.

The audience watched a wide range of acts, varying from musical talents to yo-yo tricks. Families, faculty, and friends gathered to watch and cheer on performers.

***Blueprint** would like to acknowledge that Jake Colaco is a member of **Blueprint** staff.*

DEIB Debrief

Sameed Marco and Mila Ellis | Online Content Manager and Staff Writer

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

Every March, the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD) partners with the Association of University Centers on Disabilities, and National Disability Rights Network to recognize Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.

Former President Ronald Reagan first established the month in 1987 focusing on highlighting the importance of fostering a society where people with disabilities are empowered to contribute to their communities.

Today, the month involves a national social media campaign to raise awareness about the inclusion of people with developmental disabilities and awareness of the barriers people with disabilities continue to face. The NACDD creates an annual campaign with a designated theme each year. For 2025, the NACDD theme is We're Here All Year, emphasizing community, opportunity, and accessibility.

To celebrate the month, Acalanes Leadership hosted various events to support all students with disabilities. The National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month campaign "Light It Up Blue" encouraged people to wear blue as a symbol of solidarity with people with Autism Spectrum Disorder. With World Autism Awareness Day on April 2, Acalanes Leadership and much of the student body showed their support by wearing blue on March 10 to school and the Unified Basketball game.

Students also celebrated Unified Basketball senior night on March 19, and on March 21, wore mismatched or colorfully patterned socks for World Down Syndrome Day, a tradition that the Down Syndrome Association promotes in an effort to support and celebrate differences. Finally, a Kahoot was held March 25 to educate students on various disabilities.

"The more we all learn about different mental disabilities, the better we can support and appreciate the various ways our brains work," Aca Buddies Club President Lauren Foster said.

National Arab American Heritage Month

In 2022, President Biden became the first U.S. president to declare April as Arab American Heritage Month, in recognition of the contributions of Arab Americans to the nation's history. The Arab America Foundation (AAF) advocates and promotes the month and, since 2017, has gathered proclamations from officials and organizations to recognize the month on a national level to promote Arab American achievements and celebrate Arab American cultures

In the Lafayette community, the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Governing board passed resolution 24-25-15 on Nov. 20 2024 to acknowledge April as Muslim and Arab American Heritage Month. The goals of the month include honoring the contributions of these groups and supporting Muslims and Arabs against hate speech, implicit bias, and other acts of discrimination.

"[The goal is] to honor and celebrate the contributions, history, and culture of Muslim Americans and Arab Americans, while raising awareness and promoting inclusivity," Director of Student Support, Equity, and Inclusion Rania El-Sioufi said.

Though the AUHSD governing board's resolution groups Muslim American and Arab American identities together, there is a distinction between the two groups. Arab refers to someone's ethnicity while Muslim refers to somebody's religion. While the majority of Arab Americans are Muslim, the AAF stresses the importance in avoiding conflating the two groups as they refer to different parts of people's identities.

Blueprint Editors and Staff

Print Editors-in-Chief
Maya Agarwal
Avery Robb

Online Editors-in-Chief
Sophie Chinn
Cameron Powell

Print Managing Editor/Print Head of Layout
Haley Chelemedos

Senior Graphics Editors
Sof Cerruti
Justin Rosenblatt

Head Section Editors
Jake Colaco
Olivia Foster

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Director
Zinnia Khan

Online Head of Layout
Cedric He

Head Copy Editors
Maddyx Bride
Jack Gebhardt

Print News Editor
Aamena Shipchandler

Print Feature Editors
Molly Connelly
Emily Roberts

Print Arts Editors
Tatum McElhattan
Maya Stafford

Print Opinion Editor
Neve Murphy

Print Sports Editors
Nico Roig
Cameron Thornton

News Copy Editor
Helena McGinley

Arts Copy Editor
Grace Wolpert

Opinion Copy Editor
Grace Gallacher

Print Photo Story Editor
Molly Jones

Online Editors
Arman Craig
Melina Galacatos
Saaj Shah
Audrey Parkin

Online Content Managers
Aya O'Neal
Sameed Marco

Azure *Editor-in-Chief*
Zoe Stafford

Azure *Team*
Melina Galacatos

Blueprint *Coordinator*
Levand Koopah

Social Media Managers
Donovan McGrath
Hanna Wisniewska

Business Managers
Hannah Geraghty
Sophie Gold
Jenna Kessler

Business/Community Outreach Team
Arman Craig
Donovan McGrath
Grace Wolpert

Head of Graphics
Bo Chevaleau

Heads of Photography
Audrey Martin
Cade McAlister

Senior Graphics Member
Hank Bauer

Head Cruciverbalists
Sameed Marco
Neve Murphy
Nico Roig

Staff Writers
Owen Curley
Mila Ellis
Noah Frankel
Cara Hamilton
James Hanzel
Shiraz Kamran
Mika Katznelson
Trevor Krick
Gwyneth Lee
William Miller
Madalena Obertello
Tselmeg Orgilmunkh
Natalie Pecci
Cypress Reid
Sela Sarbiewski
Sydney Scovic
Olivia Silverstein
Samantha Swift
Max Trexler
Audrey Tugade

Graphics Team Members
Isaac Topp

Advisors
James Muñoz
Bruno Morlan

LAFAYETTE PARTNERS IN EDUCATION

Blueprint thanks Lafayette Partners in Education (LPIE) for a generous contribution which will enable it to produce a high quality product for the 2024-2025 school year.

Blueprint *seeks to adhere to high standards of journalistic ethics, to report the news impartially and accurately, and to write on feature subjects of interests to our school school and community.* Blueprint *relies on its own sources for its articles and gathers and reports information firsthand. Any secondhand information or statement not obtained directly by* Blueprint *will be attributed to the source from which it was obtained. Editorials, with or without bylines, reflect the opinions of the editorial writers and are independent of the opinions of the school administration, student body, faculty, advisor, and staff. Copyright 2024. All rights reserved.*

Permission to use any portion of this publication including but not limited to electronic means is strictly prohibited without expressed written consent from Blueprint. *Send all letters and subscription requests to: ahsblueprint@auhsdschools.org*

For extended coverage, visit www.acalanesblueprint.com

FEATURE

Beyond the Bell

A look into Acalanes students' passions outside of school

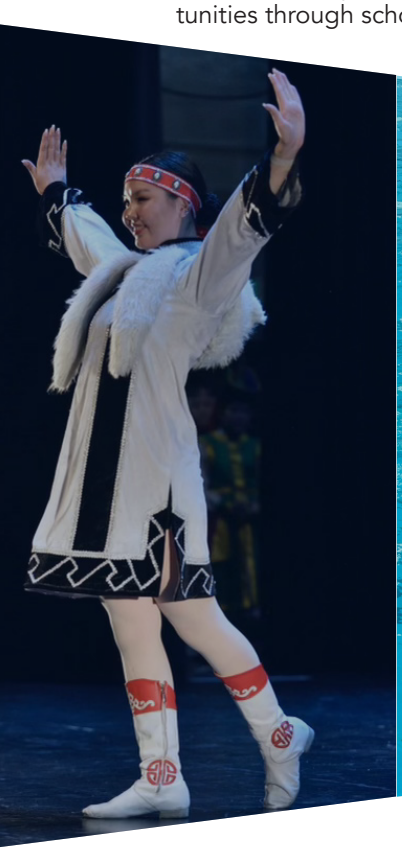
Cameron Thornton, Mika Katznelson, Cypress Reid, and Sydney Scovic | Print Sports Editor and Staff Writers

Courtesy Photos by each individual

As the bell rings to end the school day, students hurry off in different directions, eager to dive into whatever activity awaits them. While many students participate in extracurriculars, some take part in activities that are often rarely appreciated or even known about.

From unique styles of dance to uncommon sports, students put immense time and effort into perfecting their craft. Sometimes these passions extend beyond interactive activities, taking the form of immersive international experiences that expose students to new cultures and lifestyles. Although they may receive little recognition from peers or the school, these students persist in their interests, exhibiting dedication and a hard-working attitude.

With support from parents and strong time-management skills, these students have found niches to explore and make their own. Many students find these opportunities through school-based programs, but others have found practices on their own, spending years of their lives to hone their skills.



Mongolian dancing: Erica Gombodorj

Senior Erica Gombodorj participates in a style of dance that is not necessarily popular in the Acalanes community: Mongolian dance. This style of dance originates from the traditional customs of nomadic Mongolians, with each movement representing aspects of Mongolian culture and history. When performing, dancers wear colorful outfits featuring different kinds of patterns, textiles, jewelry, and headwear.

Gombodorj takes part in Mongolian dance at a cultural center, where she learns to perform dances that are both beautiful and informative.

"Each dance tells a different story about Mongolian history and there's dances about all of the histories ... from different regions. Different regions have different styles and music," Gombodorj said.

Encouraged by family, Gombodorj started her Mongolian dance journey at four years old and continues to pursue her passion today with goals for the future.

"Yesterday I organized a concert to put together and there were a bunch of dancers there. So that's kind of where I'm beginning, but I do want to continue it in the future," Gombodorj said.

To Gombodorj, Mongolian dancing is beneficial because it allows her to connect with her heritage, while also being a good exercise.

"[Mongolian dancing] definitely [helps me gain] cultural knowledge, and [at] the practices ... there's a lot of conditioning and stuff so you get more flexible and [have] more endurance," Gombodorj said.

Ballroom Dancing: Alexis Kolovyansky

Some students train in styles of dance such as ballet, tap, or hip-hop; however, sophomore Alexis Kolovyansky's style of choice is ballroom dance. Characterized by its flowing gowns and dramatic movements, ballroom dance is a technical style to perfect. Dancers perform in pairs and are most often accompanied by waltz music. Ballroom dancing originated from high-class social gatherings, and since then has progressed to become a distinct style of dance that is still celebrated today.

Kolovyansky has shown dedication to ballroom dancing as she has been working to perfect her craft from a very young age. She plans to continue pursuing this passion in the future as well.

"I started dancing when I was four years old, so it's been a while, over a decade now. I hope to do it for much longer afterward," Kolovyansky said.

Dancing between school and her rehearsals, Kolovyansky has committed many hours to her work, with arduous training and exhaustive competitions. Despite the significant time commitment and stress ballroom dance can create, Kolovyansky truly enjoys her art.

"Competitions are rigorous, sometimes I can be dancing from 5:30 in the morning to midnight or past midnight, and it's really, really intense, but that's why I do it. It's just so fun, I love competing," Kolovyansky said.

Kolovyansky's dedication has earned her a place at the renowned Blackpool Dance Festival in England. Kolovyansky competed in this historic festival in 2023, deeming it her favorite memory in her time as a ballroom dancer.

"The Empress Orchestra plays [at the Blackpool Dance Festival], so there was live music when I was dancing and it was just amazing. Hearing all of the dynamics of the music and all the different instruments and I could just feel, I can't even describe how amazing it was, it was absolutely euphoric," Kolovyansky said.

Ballroom dancing has opened opportunities for Kolovyansky, from learning to love dance, to visiting England.

"It was very stressful the months prior to the competition, [but] I was just so happy to make it to that final. I cleared my mind, and I just danced," Kolovyansky said.

Artistic Swimming: Yelyzaveta Smerechuk

Frosh Yelyzaveta Smerechuk participates in artistic swimming, more commonly known as synchronized swimming. Artistic swimming is a sport and art form in which swimmers perform choreographed routines to music, combining aspects of swimming, gymnastics, and dance.

Smerechuk's mom introduced the sport to her when she was younger and she has taken part in artistic swimming for seven years now.

"My mom showed me a video on Instagram and I thought to myself, I want to do that, and then she signed me up to our nearest club, which is in Walnut Creek," Smerechuk said.

In her seven years doing the sport, Smerechuk feels her connection with her teammates has been a large motivation in her decision to continue participating.

"I like doing it because of the team ... Since you are with the same people for years, you build a really strong relationship, and honestly it is really hard to leave the sport after that," Smerechuk said.

Throughout her career in artistic swimming, Smerechek has overcome numerous difficulties, which has taught her the importance of perseverance.

"[One] time I got placed on a team [where] I didn't know anyone and I didn't think I was going to do it that year, but it really taught me to go through these hardships and [that] not everything comes out the way you want it [to] in life and that's okay," Smerechuk said.

Rowing: Daisy Gohres

Junior Daisy Gohres participates in Oakland Strokes' women's rowing team at the Oakland estuary. One thing Gohres enjoys about rowing is the clear improvement showing and empowering nature of competing.

"I practice 20 hours a week but by the end of the season during regionals. When we get first, second or third, and then we go to nationals, I have moments where I am like 'wow, I did this really cool thing that I put so much time into. It is something I can really be proud of," Gohres said.

With this amount of training and preparation, Gohres' evenings are often packed with rowing, as they row six days a week. This forces them to work on managing both their school work and extracurriculars.

"Mostly it is really about time management because I get home at eight every day ... Usually I try to get a lot of school work done during the day, either lunch or academy, and then I can finish up in the two hours before I have to go to sleep," Gohres said.

With the sheer amount of conditioning and work people must put in for rowing, Gohres has seen an improvement in attitude towards difficulties for the rest of their life.

"When I [was] faced with things that may be hard before rowing, I would have looked at and thought like this is the worst thing ever, I can't do this. Now I can go, I do this really hard thing every single day, so now maybe I can also do this thing," Gohres said.

S p a i n
Exchange: Abigail Thomas

Junior Abigail Thomas will be spending the first half of her senior year in an exchange program in Spain. Despite being in a different country, the school schedule would be similar to what Thomas has experienced in America.

"During the day you go to school, and then you live with a host family, and after school you can do whatever extracurriculars you want. Some people have discussion groups with people from Spain, some people do volunteer work, like the senior center, or you can do sports or tutor people in English," Thomas said.

The dream to live in Spain was rooted in Thomas' childhood after going to a Spanish immersion school when young. She learned about culture and language in her kindergarten classes, enhancing her desire to visit.

"A few years later, I went and I visited Spain and you know that feeling where you just know, this is where I have to be. I started thinking about it my entire middle school and high school career, and then I realized that it was my last chance to do it, so I just decided that I would do it," Thomas said.

Germany Study Abroad: Brooke Rardin

Junior Brooke Rardin is currently living in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany for an exchange program called Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX). The exchange program takes 250 kids from both the U.S. and Germany and swaps the students to different places in the countries. The program was created after World War II to better elations between Germany and America. Both American and German governments fund the program so Rardin is there on a full-ride scholarship. After hearing about it from her history teacher she went through an extensive process to be accepted into the program.

"There were five short essay questions. You had to have two recommendation letters and there's three interview rounds that I had to do. And then I had to get a recommendation from my area representative in California," Rardin said.

Rardin meets with the other kids from the program twice a year and participates in seminars where they share their experiences. The program did not require Rardin to learn German beforehand and provided the students with a language camp ahead of time.

"All of August I was in Wurzburg at a language camp with 50 kids from my program ... [In German], I actually I only knew the basics like how to say my name and my age," Rardin said.

Rardin is now fully immersed in the culture and language and has adapted to her new school in Germany. She is on two different swim teams and a volleyball team and is living with her host family in the small town of Recklinghausen.

"Now that I'm here, I'm surrounded by German every day. I speak German with my host family, and my friends, and my whole school is in German so I take all my classes in German," Rardin said.

The program has also encouraged Rardin to be more involved and develop an interest in politics. In Germany, she plays the role of being a school ambassador for America.

"I gave a presentation about the election and what the electoral college is in my politics class and that was really fun. Being able to teach people about it but also hear their opinions and different points of view is another part of this program that I love," Rardin said.

Rardin also helped educate the Acalanes threads class, a combination of world history English 1 classes, about schools in Germany. She zoomed with their classes on Mar. 20, after Schottland requested a conversation.

"I thought that would be a really interesting thing to hear from her since she is going through history class there and what it is like studying history in Germany, specifically about that whole time period," World History and Comparative Government teacher Joseph Schottland said.

During the call with Brooke, the students not only gained insight to her life in Germany but also what it is like living in a completely new country.

"Germany has way more school subjects than here… they have 11 classes and we only have seven ... Brooke said that she really enjoyed this difference. While she was homesick at first, the more she got to know the people she started to think of her host family as her second family and she really loves it there," frosh Sifth Sandhu said. "I have learned that even though it might be hard at first, it is a nice life experience and you gain a lot of important lessons and see how the world is like in different places."

AGATE: Teagan Frase

Each year, a select group of juniors from schools across the Acalanes Union High School District have the opportunity to participate in the Acalanes Gifted and Talented Education (AGATE) program. The AGATE program gives students the freedom to choose what area they want to explore but ultimately requires them to create a final project that is then evaluated to determine whether or not they receive academic credit.

AGATE has two sessions per school year, one in the fall and one in the spring, that both include a trip to Monterey, the location that the final projects are based on.

"We have to do a project surrounding Monterey, so it's only fitting that we get to go to Monterey. We go to a bunch of places that you might not get to go to if you were just on a normal trip ... We got to go kayaking in the Elkhorn Slough, and we got to go to some historical sites and some museums I've never heard of before. It was really cool," Frase said.

Upon returning from the Monterey trip, students begin to work on their projects with help from advisors. Putting together the project can be time-consuming, but ultimately rewarding for many students.

"You have to do at least 25 hours of work outside of school, but I think I did around 70 [to] 80. It was a ton of work, but it was really fun work. That was the best part, ... you get to choose whatever you want to do," Frase said.

Despite the time commitment, the students report that the AGATE program helps many develop academically and socially. Because the program takes students from different schools across the district, participants have the opportunity to form new connections with neighboring peers.

"It was really great getting to meet new people from different schools. It was hard getting to know people the first couple meetings, but then by the time we went to Monterey, I had made some really amazing friends," Frase said.

Frase chose to research political activism in the Monterey area. They were specifically inspired by the artist and activist John Steinbeck, whom they were able to learn about during the trip to Monterey.

"When I was in Monterey, the first place we visited right out of the the vans was the John Steinbeck Museum, and that was definitely one of my favorite places we went on that trip …What really fascinated me was getting to see the impact of his work," Frase said, "A lot of us know John Steinbeck from [his career as] a classic author, but I had no idea the amount of change that he made in his very own community and so many different areas."

Frase's project on political activism eventually took shape in the form of a book, filled with information about activists advocating for social and political change in the Monterey area, complemented by colorful visuals throughout.

"My project was this giant book, so each page was the size of a 22 by 28 poster, and the covers were made of wood … It told the story of different artists in Monterey and how they stimulated political change through their art throughout history," Frase said.

In addition to presenting the work of other activists, Frase used their artistic abilities to create original artwork that included an underlying call to action, encouraging community members to have confidence in their ability to inspire positive impact.

"I also made ... a political art piece of my own. It was all to show that anyone can make political change or social change in whatever means they feel right for them, especially using art," Frase said.

To read about Geometry and Algebra 1 teacher Spencer Hight's fencing experience in a Historical European Martial Arts club, visit* Blueprint *Online.

Syria Massacre

Tselmeg Orgilmunkh | Staff Writer

Blueprint would like to disclaim this article contains mentions of violence and murder.

As Syria grapples with the aftermath of conflict and the fall of a longstanding regime, the recent spiral of bloodshed reminds many of the country's longstanding challenges with political stability and social solidarity. From March 6 to March 10, over 1,000 people were massacred throughout Syria, the majority being innocent civilians. Political unrest and violence have swept Syria's streets after the overthrow of former president Bashar al-Assad on Dec. 9, 2024. This marks the end of the 13-year civil war between pro-democracy protesters and the Assad regime, in which over 600,000 were killed.

Many consider al-Assad a dictator due to his 24-year leadership enabling corruption, war crimes, torture, extrajudicial killings, and mass surveillance. He is also affiliated with the ethno-religious group Alawite, where most al-Assad loyalists originate. However, not all Alawis support him, and many believe they suffered just as much regardless of being favored under his rule. Syrians appointed Ahmed al-Sharaa as the interim president through popular vote, hoping to mend their country.

Al-Assad loyalist gunmen recently ambushed and killed around 16 members of the new security force and the Ministry of Defence as a rebellion. To avenge the officers, security forces responded by sending armed groups, government supporters, and other reinforcements to villages in the Alawite majority provinces of Latakia, Tartus, Homs, and Idlib.

The new government harassed, kidnapped, looted, and shot innocent citizens, including children, as revenge. According to testimonies, offenders asked residents if they were Alawi or Sunni, another major branch of Islam, then shot Alawi people. Another cause of citizen deaths is al-Assad loyalists raiding hospitals and clashing with security forces, resulting in dozens of citizen casualties and damage to hospitals. They killed citizens for opposing Assad, especially Alawis who were suspected of supporting the new Sunni-Islamist-led government.

President Al-Sharaa spoke regarding the massacre on March 9, saying remnants of the Assad government are attempting to divide Syria through conflict. He promised to hold murderers and mistreaters of civilians accountable. Intending to improve unity, he announced a civil peace-preserving committee to support and protect people on the Mediterranean coast. President Al-Sharaa believes the mass killings of Alawis go against his mission to unite the country, and promises to punish those responsible, even if they are his allies.

Volcano Eruption in Guatemala

Audrey Tugade | Staff Writer

In San Juan Alotenango, Guatemala, the infamous Volcán de Fuego started to erupt on March 5. This sparked 300 families to evacuate on March 10 with another 30,000 still in an area of risk. The disaster agency was urging people to evacuate or self-evacuate. Authorities report that people 60 kilometers away in the nation's capital could also be at risk of the volcano's eruption.

Volcán de Fuego is one of the most active volcanoes in Central America with several small eruptions in past years consisting of gas and small amounts of ash, but the volcano has also had a history of major eruptions with the last in June 2023. These major eruptions have resulted in numerous deaths and immense amounts of damage in towns. The volcano was only inactive for 50 days prior to this eruption.

In the native language of Cachiquel, some Guatemalans refer to the volcano as the "Chi'gag", or the place where fire is. The volcano, part of the Central America Volcano arc, has an elevation of 12,346

feet and a summit height of 3,763. The volcano is surrounded by small towns despite its activity.

The eruption started overnight with a hiking group first reporting activity on the volcano on March 9. The hikers were climbing Acatenango Mountain, a neighboring mountain, and captured a video on TikTok showing the volcano ejecting gas and ash. All hikers were later forced to evacuate down the mountain when lava started to spew. Around 50 to 60 hikers were on the mountain, which took two and a half hours to descend.

The ash caused authorities to close schools and a key road in the vicinity of the volcano. However, experts were concerned about the biggest danger of volcanoes, lahars, which are a mixture of mud, ash, debris, and rock and can bury entire towns.

Shortly after the first eruption, the volcanic flow of material was moderate but was expected to increase according to Guatamalas' disaster agency. Airports were not closed but airlines had to operate with restrictions due to ash clouds that could reach up to 7,000 meters.

The last major eruption in Guatemala was in 2018. That eruption resulted in 194 casualties and 234 missing. So far there have been no reported casualties, but many fear that continued eruptions could result in fatalities, especially due to the volcano's history of tragedies. As of March 16, the volcano has calmed and the evacuees have started to return home.

Canadian Prime Minister Re-election

Tselmeg Orgilmunkh | Staff Writer

Amid American elections and affairs receiving extreme global attention, another election unfolded. On March 14, the Liberal Party of Canada elected a new prime minister, 59-year-old Mark Carney who won 86 percent of the votes.

Previous Prime Minister Justin Trudeau resigned on Jan. 6, feeling he could no longer lead the country through economic and political instability. His party, the Liberals, has increasingly encouraged him to step down, especially after his deputy prime minister and ally Chrystia Freeland abruptly resigned on Dec. 16. According to the Angus Reid Institute, by late 2024, his support had plummeted. Only 22 percent of Canadians believed Trudeau was doing a good job. Consequently, many felt his unpopularity damaged the Liberal Party's chances of winning the next election.

With the next Canadian federal election arriving later this year on Oct. 20, the Liberals needed to select their 2025 party candidate quickly and opted to continue support for Prime Minister Carney due to his extensive experience with economic policymaking and investment. He must now guide the country through a trade war and annexation threats with U.S. President Donald Trump.

Carney navigated the 2008 financial crisis as the head of the Bank of Canada and was governor of the Bank of England–the only non-native born citizen to do so. He aims to prioritize protecting Canadian workers and families from trade actions and growing the economy. Some citizens feel he must also divert attention to the high cost of living and the effects of record immigration– both aspects that led to Trudeau's resignation.

During Carney's swearing-in ceremony, he announced that the idea of Canada becoming the 51st state of the U.S. is "crazy." He does not plan to discuss the trade war or annexation threats with President Trump but states he is prepared and willing if the discussion is respectful toward Canadian sovereignty. Instead, on March 17, Carney visited French President Emmanuel Macron, U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer, and King Charles III in Europe to diversify trade partners and strengthen economic security.

During the official prime minister election, Carney will run against the leader of the Conservative Party, Pierre Poilievre, leader of the New Democratic Party, Jagmeet Singh, and co-leaders of the Green Party–Elizabeth May and Jonathan Pedneault.

Local Government Briefs

Shiraz Kamran and Mika Katznelson | Staff Writers

City Council

The Lafayette City Council held its first of two bimonthly meetings on March 10, with a third special meeting on March 7. The public can access the meeting's minutes, agenda, and audio on the City of Lafayette website, and the Council posts a livestream of the meeting on the City of Lafayette's YouTube channel. Community members can also virtually join the meeting on Zoom through the city website. For the meeting, the council opened with a closed session followed by public comments.

At their March 7 meeting, the council established the city reserve fund for financial stability, explored additional revenue sources such as sales tax and grants, and prepared for long-term sustainability for the 2024-25 Fiscal Year (FY). Meanwhile, in anticipation of staff turnover by FY 2024-25, the council discussed retention, succession, and training with proposals for flexible job descriptions, enhanced training, career paths, and strategic hiring. Lastly, they talked about the impact of new CalFire hazard maps and prepared to implement new defensible space and wildfire regulations.

During the March 10 meeting, the council unanimously approved supporting Measure T, an eight-year parcel tax to support local schools.

Additionally, the council heard from Rob Sturm, the Lafayette School District Board President, who discussed the history and legal context regarding crossing guards, requesting the council transfer crossing guard responsibilities from the school district to the city.

Governing Board

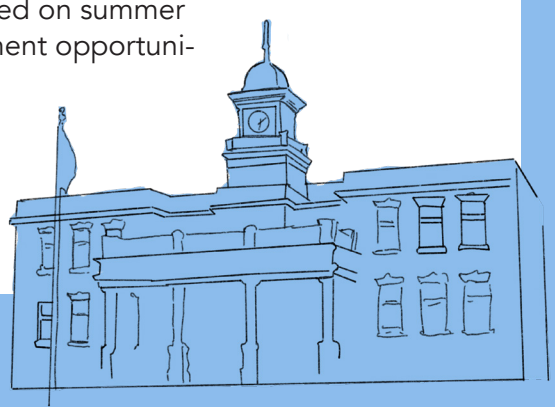
The Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Governing Board met on March 5, with a special meeting on March 10. The AUHSD website contains recordings of all meetings, which are viewable by the public. The meeting started with public comments, followed by a report from Acalanes Education Association (AEA) President Lori Tewksbury on campus events.

The Governing Board recognized March as Disability Awareness Month, reaffirming the district's commitment to inclusive education. This meeting included a presentation that showcased programs that support students with disabilities and promote a culture of belonging.

The Board reviewed and approved updates to the AUHSD Facility Rental Handbook, revising rental fees to align with increased operational costs. This included a presentation that detailed facility use data and plans for the maintenance of school athletic and community-use spaces.

The Board also received reports on the district's financial outlook, including the 2024-2025 Second Interim Budget Report, which confirmed that AUHSD would meet its financial obligations for the current and next two fiscal years. Additionally, updates were provided on summer school offerings for 2025, including academic recovery and enrichment opportunities.

Finally, in their March 10 special meeting, the Governing Board worked with an outside facilitator from Epoch Education to build governance skills and support effective communication, collaboration, and community engagement.



Connelly's Corner: War and Words

Exploring the impacts of President Trump's meetings with Ukraine and Russia

Molly Connelly | Print Feature Editor
Spread by Justin Rosenblatt

During the Cold War, the U.S. and Russia squared off in a global chess match, each move calculated to outmaneuver the other. Even decades later, the rivalry still lingers, shaping American foreign policy over each piece in the game. Now, a recent high-stakes meeting has added a new twist to the game, forcing the U.S. to reconsider its next move.

Trump's recent meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy ended in tension, as Trump criticized Ukraine for a perceived lack of gratitude for U.S. aid. The meeting, which was expected to strengthen ties, instead led to the suspension of military assistance, raising concerns about Ukraine's ability to defend itself against Russia. Meanwhile, European leaders stepped up their own defense commitments, highlighting a growing divide between the U.S. and its allies on how to support Ukraine.

Trump followed up this meeting with the statement to reporters that he wants "an immediate ceasefire" if Ukraine wants to maintain U.S. support and that he did not believe Zelenskyy was interested in peace.

Zelenskyy addressed this in a subsequent interview with Fox News, saying that Ukraine will not enter peace talks with Russia unless they have security guarantees. He argued that if he gave an order to stop fighting "nobody would stop" because "everyone is afraid Putin will come back tomorrow."

Zelensky stated "We want just and lasting peace," and while he believes the White House meeting was "not good for both sides," he believes that his relationship with Trump can be fixed.

Following this meeting, major European powers spoke out to declare their support for Ukraine. European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said, "Today it became clear that the free world needs a new leader. It is up to us, Europeans, to take this challenge."

French President Emmanuel Macron stated in response to the meeting, "There is an aggressor, Russia, and a people who have suffered, which is Ukraine … [Ukraine is] fighting for their dignity, [for] their independence, for their children, and for the security of Europe."

Germany's likely next chancellor Friedrich Merz responded in a public message to Zelenskyy stating he would stand with Ukraine "in good and in testing times."

Trump's relationship with Zelenskyy has been defined by controversy, beginning with the 2019 phone call that led to Trump's first impeachment. In the call, Trump urged Zelenskyy to investigate then-candidate Joe Biden and his son Hunter, while withholding nearly $400 million in military aid. The incident sparked a congressional inquiry, with the Democrats arguing it was an abuse of power and Republicans defending Trump's actions as a push for anti-corruption measures in Ukraine.

Following Trump's suspension of military aid, U.S. National Security Advisor Mike Waltz and Secretary of State Marco Rubio met with Saudi and Ukranian officials in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on March 11, where they agreed that the U.S. resume sending military aid and intelligence to Ukraine.

The statement from the U.S and Ukraine released immediately following the March 11 meeting stated that "Ukraine expressed readiness to accept the U.S. proposal to enact an immediate, interim 30-day ceasefire, which can be extended by mutual agreement of the parties, and which is subject to acceptance and concurrent implementation by the Russian Federation."

Following the meeting with Ukraine, Trump spoke on the phone with Russian President Vladimir Putin on March 19 about a potential ceasefire with Ukraine. Putin agreed to a 30-day halt on energy infrastructure strikes by both sides and is moving forward with a halt to fighting in the Black Sea, which is advantageous to Russian trade. The White House stated that they hope this will lead to a full ceasefire and peace agreement after the three-year war.

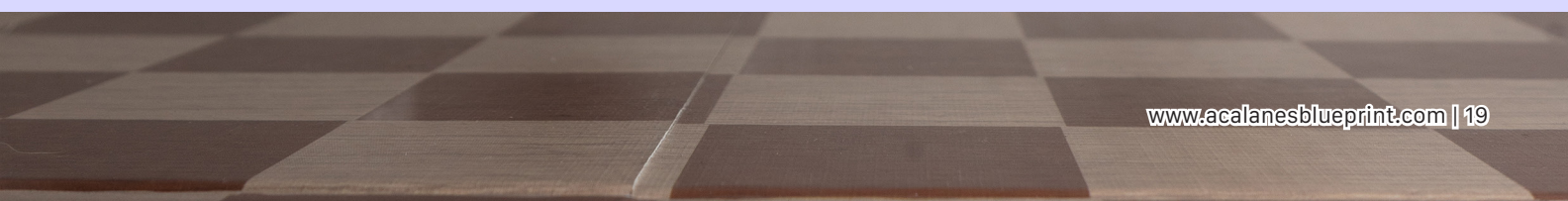
During this phone call, Putin conceded very little and was mostly limited to elements of Trump's proposal that benefit Russia, such as resumed trade in the Black Sea. Putin made it clear that Russia would not agree to the ceasefire agreed on by the U.S. and Ukraine. The Kremlin added after this conversation that their "key condition" was a "complete cessation" of foreign military and intelligence assistance. This would limit Ukraine's ability to resist any Russian military invasion in the future.

Analysts responded to this meeting by arguing that this marks Russia's resurgence as one of the great powers in altering the fates of smaller nations and Russia successfully asserting its influence over the U.S..This also continues a theme of influential discussions about Ukraine without a Ukrainian representative being present.

Tatiana Stanovaya, Russia analyst with the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, argued that the most significant outcome of this phone call was the implicit acceptance of U.S.-Russia cooperation on key international issues. She stated on social media that "this marks an obvious victory for Putin."

Trump spoke to Zelenskyy the following day on March 19 about the terms of a potential ceasefire, to which Zelenskyy gave the statement that he and Trump have instructed their teams to "resolve technical issues relating to implementing and expanding the partial ceasefire." They also both stated that they will continue to meet to work towards peace.

The details of the agreement are still ambiguous and evolving, but for now the chess match continues. However, this time experts are unclear if the U.S. and Russia are truly facing off, or perhaps are on the same side. One thing is clear: Russia plans to continue moving its chess pieces.



Green Hills, Great Schools

Examining the implications of potential parcel tax Measure T on AUHSD Schools

Neve Murphy, Emily Roberts, Gwyneth Lee, and Tselmeg Orgilmunkh | Print Opinion Editor, Print Feature Editor, and Staff Writers

Spread by Bo Chevaleau

As springtime blooms pervade Lafayette's prominent green hills, a new measure that aims to maintain the abundance of resources across Lamorinda schools faces the community. Just as the hills are green, community members seek to fulfill the rest of Lafayette's slogan, "Green Hills, Great Schools," by discussing the upcoming measure designed to benefit local schools.

The Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Governing Board unanimously voted to include Measure T, a $130 parcel tax, on the May 6 special election ballot to increase school funding. If it passes, Measure T would provide $4 million in funding for the district to help support programs, hire high-quality teachers, maintain class sizes, and provide up-to-date technology and supplies.

Parcel taxes help school districts, specifically those in California, to raise funds locally. A parcel tax is a set property tax that is based on ownership rather than value and is active for a set period of time. Measure T would be implemented for the next eight years and is subject to fluctuation.

"The parcel tax that's going to the voters would be asking the registered voters if they support $130 per parcel annual tax to support the high schools in the district. It would be for eight years, and it would have an adjustment annually based on inflation, but not to exceed three percent," AUHSD Superintendent Dr. John Nickerson said.

The proposed Measure T would require Lamorinda residents to pay a tax on each property they own in the area, with exceptions for more vulnerable members of the community including elderly people and people with disabilities. These individuals must apply for an exemption, as it is not automatic.

"[People age] 65 and older can apply for a senior exemption, which means they don't have to pay the parcel tax. That protects our senior citizens that are maybe on a fixed income, don't have a salary that's coming in, or living off of either savings, pensions or social security. A little bit different from the past parcel tax, we [also] have an exemption for folks on [Social Security Disability Insurance]," President of the Government Board Jennifer Chen said.

For Measure T to pass, it needs to receive a two-thirds majority on the May 6 ballot. The Acalanes Governing Board sent out an initial survey to gauge community support of the tax and how much residents were willing to pay. This data bred confidence among the Board in the likelihood of the bill's passage.

"The initial polling data we got back was so good that we felt we should go out for the election as soon as possible. We did the polling in December, and it came in about 68 [to] 69 percent of the community felt in favor of the parcel. You need 66 percent to pass," AUHSD Deputy Superintendent Amy McNamara said.

The AUHSD also used the initial survey to find out where Lafayette residents believed funding should be prioritized.

"The district convened a survey to find out from parents what they valued in the district. What they value is science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education. They want to support attracting and retaining teachers. They're supporting the class sizes that exist at the high schools and keeping class sizes at manageable numbers for teachers to teach," McNamara said.

A group of parents set up a campaign to fund the advocacy for the measure. The

group of volunteers is in charge of advertising and collecting donations.

"While we can do the poll and contract and pay for the election, we can't actually campaign for it using any district resources. A group of parents have set up the Measure T campaign that will be funded through donations from the community," McNamara said.

The May 6 date is not within the general election cycle that occurs in the fall, with the next one being in November 2026. To host the special election requires taxpayers to pay to fund the necessary measures to have the election, which was a point of discussion when deciding on the measure.

If passed, Measure T would operate alongside former parcel taxes, Measures G and A implemented in 2010 and 2015 respectively. Measure G, known as the Excellence in Education Tax of 2009, primarily intended to protect core classes like science, mathematics, arts, music, and foreign language from deep state budget cuts. Measure A, the Sustain Educational Excellence Tax, is intended to preserve a high quality of education at local high schools and retain high-quality teachers while maintaining class sizes.

The Measure G parcel implemented a flat tax of $189 per parcel and Measure A charged $112 per parcel. From the combination of the two measures, Lamorinda property owners pay $301 per parcel to support the AUHSD. Measure T would add an additional $130, raising the tax to $431 per parcel.

Parcel taxes are a crucial aspect of the AUHSD's funding, as the district receives minimal financial support from the state. California school districts typically receive the main portion of their funding from the state, which uses the Local Control Funding Formula to allocate funding based on a district's share of high-need, low-income, English Learner, and foster students. As the AUHSD has a small percentage of high-need students, it receives limited state funding.

"[In] California, the allocation to our school district is the lowest of all high school districts in the state. We receive very few dollars above the base funding amount, and the base funding amount is not adequate for education. Because of that, we're very dependent on local funding," Dr. Nickerson said.

California schools received one-time federal COVID-19 relief money in 2021 through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, which was created under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act. However, the District has now used the majority of this one-time funding.

"The parcel tax that's going to the voters would be asking the registered voters if they support $130 per parcel annual tax to support the high schools in the district. It would be for eight years, and it would have an adjustment annually based on inflation, but not to exceed three percent," AUHSD Superintendent Dr. John Nickerson said.

"The initial polling data we got back was so good that we felt we should go out for the election as soon as possible. We did the polling in December, and it came in about 68 [to] 69 percent of the community felt in favor of the parcel. You need 66 percent to pass," AUHSD Deputy Superintendent Amy McNamara said.

"We are not getting enough money from the state, we're one of the lowest funded districts. We were able to kind of cover the gap between what we were taking in and what we were spending with one-time money that's going away," Acalanes Education Association President, Co-Science Department Chair, and Living Earth teacher Lori Tewkesbury said.

While the AUHSD exhausts previous funding sources, inflation has led to rises in the costs of materials. Resources that are essential to students and certain programs across the district are now more expensive, as are standard salaries for teachers, while the revenue brought in by Measures G and A remains constant.

"The cost of everything has gone up, [including] electricity [and] repairs. As teacher salaries have risen for us to stay competitive with other districts, the ability of those former parcels, which will stay, will continue to create revenue for the district. They just don't generate enough revenue for us. Our deficit this year is over $4 million," McNamara said.

The AUHSD hopes Measure T will help combat inflation and uphold Acalanes standards of classrooms, teachers, and programs.

"I think [Measure T] will keep classroom sizes more to what they are [now]. Some districts have many more students in a classroom, and that obviously impacts how stressed a teacher is, how well a teacher can teach, and the student experience in the classroom," Chen said. "So our hope is that it keeps things more where they are at, and reduces any kind of layoffs or ... negative impacts to carry down the programs that we offer."

In response to the lack of funding, the AUHSD has begun to initiate its largest budget cuts in recent years. This will continue to increase if Measure T does not pass, as the district can not continue to fund areas through reserves.

"We're making some initial cuts next year. We're cutting about $1.5 million for next year, and try to do it in a way that students won't feel the impact at least immediately. If the parcel tax doesn't pass, we'll need to make more significant cuts in the next couple of years because we won't be able to use the reserves anymore," Dr. Nickerson said.

Without Measure T, current areas of teacher support, including professional development opportunities will likely be reduced according to site-level budget restrictions.

"While it's important that our staff has opportunities for professional development, that would be one of the first things that we would reduce. We would be reducing the way we support our staff in meetings, technology budgets, [and] the amount of folks that can come in and support additionally on campus," Acalanes principal Eric Shawn said.

With the likelihood of the new parcel tax raising teacher salaries, the District might attract more quality teachers.

"[Measure T] can also impact how we negotiate salaries for teachers, which of course then impacts if teachers want to stay here, if they want to come here, or if we need to hire. We want to try to keep our teachers' salaries competitive so that we get the best teachers [and] the most qualified teachers for our students," Chen said.

The funding that Measure T would provide will continue the courses that will be available to students, as well as the degree of instruction students will receive.

"This money will enable us to kind of continue to think about ways we can creatively offer students more electives [and courses] they want to take, engage students in science and math, and provide a lot of professional development for our teachers," McNamara said.

"I think [Measure T] will keep classroom sizes more to what they are [now]. Some districts have many more students in a classroom, and that obviously impacts how stressed a teacher is, how well a teacher can teach, and the student experience in the classroom," AUHSD Governing Board President Jennifer Chen said. "So our hope is that it keeps things more where they are at, and reduces any kind of layoffs."

Many students feel that elective courses provide an effective opportunity to discover and explore interests, hoping the future course of district funding will not impact their courses.

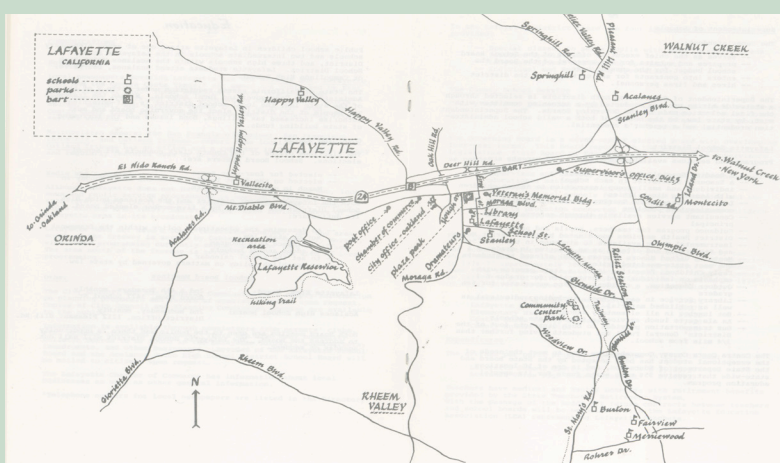
"If [Acalanes] doesn't offer [elective] classes, then I'll never know [my passion]. I know they offer the free [Diablo Valley College] courses, but I feel like it's so much more impactful to take a class to see what it's like to have that kind of work," sophomore Amelia Riley said.

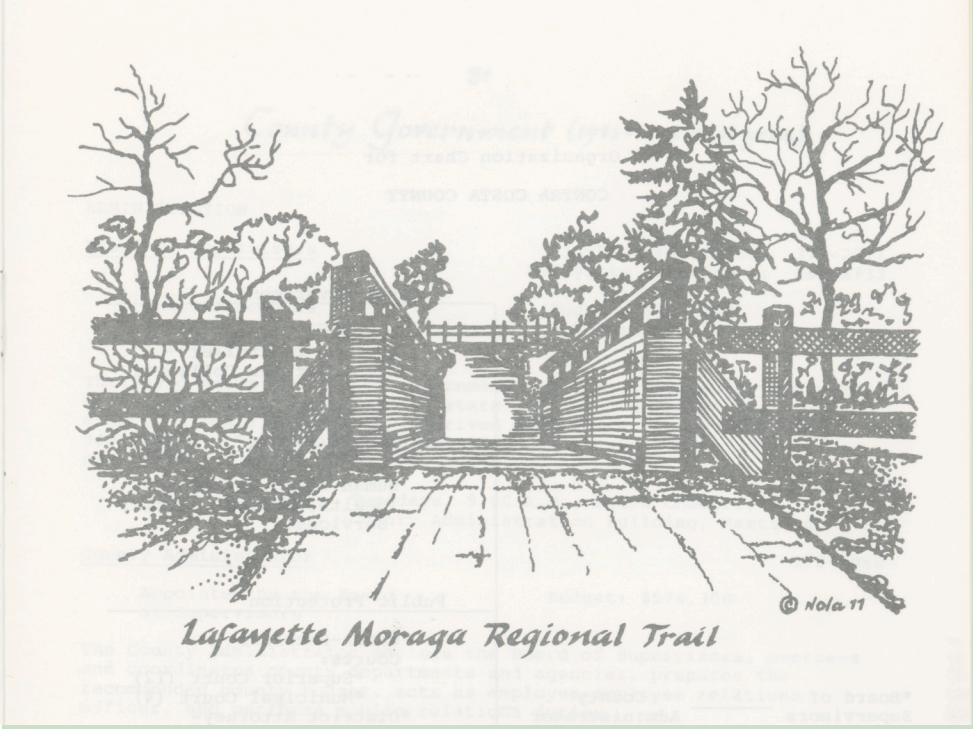
One elective that Acalanes recently implemented is Advanced Placement (AP) African American History. Classes such as this can allow students to explore interests through a diverse curriculum.

"For [AP African American studies] specifically, I took that class because I really like history. So it gave me an extra opportunity to take a history course," junior Max Martinez said. "Especially with [AP European History] and other history courses, [I think] they're very [Eurocentric-focused]. So [AP African American studies] focuses on African American history ... and these aren't topics that are normally talked about, or at least not gone into detail in other courses. It gives us an opportunity to actually learn about something that we normally don't know much about."

If classroom sizes increase with budget cuts, some students anticipate an environment that's difficult to learn material due to an over-extended teacher and less one-on-one time for questions.

"I do think [classroom sizes] will affect how much I understand the curriculum because I know [teachers] talk to us and





present to us, but that specific time where teachers talk [one on one with a] student, I think it is really critical," Riley said.

Some citizens notice incoming families are attracted to Lamorinda because of the prestige of local schools, which can benefit housing markets and local businesses.

"When I meet a new family that comes into our area, I ask them 'Why did you move here?' Almost 100 percent of the time people say I moved here because of the schools. Since you have people moving here, it helps our real estate market, housing market, local businesses in our cities, [and] our restaurants. So the schools in our area are really central to a lot of what happens in our community," Chen said.

Some community members believe students are the future, so funding schools are crucial. They value investing in schools to equip students with early experiences and skills that will enable them to improve society.

"It really protects our future because all students here are the folks that are going to be voting on policies that impact me. You're going to be creating policies and doing amazing things that impact my life. So we want to invest in our students because without you all getting what you deserve as far as education and access to opportunities, that's just going to not make our society as strong," Chen said.

The Contra Costa County election division is responsible for organizing the May 6, 2025 election where residents will vote on this parcel tax.

"We were contacted by the Acalanes Union High School District about conducting a special election for them in May. From there, our candidate services team worked with the District to ensure that they comply with all the election code. That requires a resolution from the Governing Board calling for the election and the Governing Board giving us all the details about what they want to put on the ballot," Contra Costa County Clerk Recorder and Registrar of Voters *Kristin Connelly said.

This county division faced a lawsuit as the Contra Costa Taxpayers Association found that the ballot's language was misleading and not transparent to voters. Marc Joffe and Adrian Malagon, members of the association, filed a complaint and led a petition to change the language.

In a statement on March 6, Joffe said, "The impartial analysis gave the false impression that Measure T would raise district parcel taxes from $112 to $130, when, in fact, they will increase from a current total of $301 to $431, followed by annual inflation increases. The ballot question tried to confuse voters by calling these inflationary increases 'adjustments.'"

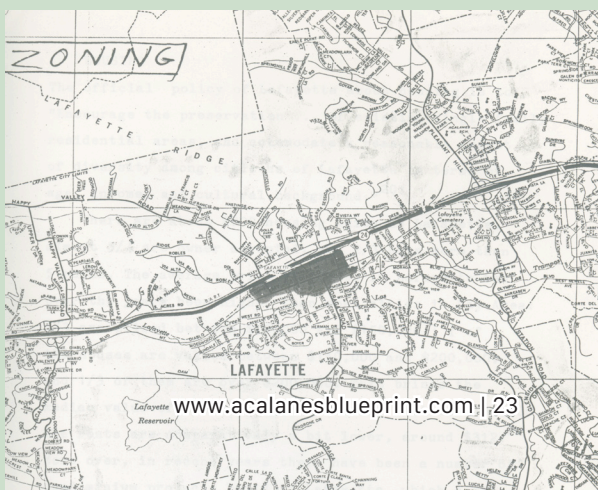
Joffe and Malagon petitioned for a writ of mandate and compelled Connelly to make changes to the ballot materials of Measure T. Ultimately, the court order partially granted and partially denied the petition.

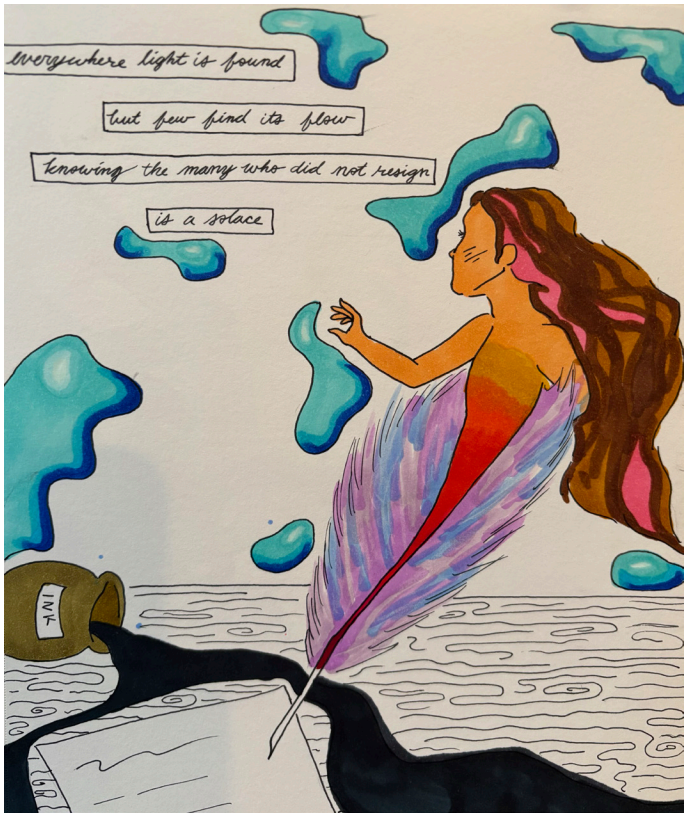
Despite facing some pushback, the District continues to propose Measure T in hopes of sustaining and improving the community's quality of schools.

"One of the things we put on our flags in town is 'Green Hills, Great Schools.' It was shared with me that the city of Lafayette has never failed to support a parcel tax measure that supports schools in the past. I think that commitment is important and at the very least we should get a gauge of how the community feels by everyone coming out, voting, and sharing what they think," Shawn said.

***Blueprint** would like to acknowledge that Kristin Connelly is related to Molly Connelly, a member of* **Blueprint** *staff.*

"When I meet a new family that comes into our area, I ask them 'Why did you move here?' Almost 100 percent of the time people say I moved here because of the schools. Since you have people moving here, it helps our real estate market, housing market, local businesses in our cities, [and] our restaurants. So the schools in our area are really central to a lot of what happens in our community," Chen said.





The Power of Poetry for Progress

Lamorinda Arts Council hosts Women's History Month poetry event

Cameron Powell and Sela Sarbiewski | Online Editor-in-Chief and Staff Writer

Graphic by Sof Cerruti

"Everywhere light is found / but a few find its flow / knowing the many who did not resign / is a solace," poet Harleen Serai spoke into a microphone with a spotlight cast upon her.

The Lamorinda Arts Council (LAC) hosted "Art Embraces Poetry" on March 8 at Town Hall Theatre in recognition of Women's History Month. The event consisted of poetry reading, artwork viewing, and an open mic.

LAC has organized "Art Embraces Poetry" events in the past, including one last year with the theme of Black History Month. This year, they chose to hold it in March in hopes of a higher audience turnout and to recognize Women's History Month.

Since 1987, Women's History Month has highlightedw the tireless efforts for gender equality and celebrate women's contributions throughout history. LAC aimed to provide an opportunity for community members to express their passions and creativity to an audience on International Women's Day.

The first hour involved presentations from three poets, one writer, and one visual artist. After the featured speakers shared their work and answered listeners' questions, audience members also had a turn to speak in the open mic.

"We realize that there are not a lot of places for poets, especially emerging poets, to say whatever it is they have to say. It's pretty intimidating … most of the people who read haven't read a lot, and that's what we're trying to serve," LAC Board Member and Art Embraces Poetry co-Founder Elana O'Loskey said.

Featured poets presented multiple pieces experimenting with their style and expressing their passions through poetry.

"I like Shakespeare, and I used to read [his works] in high school. I loved reading his sonnets, so I wanted to go for it and write something in iambic pentameter, for which I used the letter and the fictional piece as a basis for," featured poet Jennifer Granat said.

The afternoon's theme, officially Girls and Women Influencers, was evident in the messages speakers shared honoring the important women in their lives.

"[My] piece about sky blue-pink came to me because my nanna used to use that term … So the purpose of the piece was to recognize her and all loving nanas," Granat said.

While many of the poems were connected to a theme of empowering women, they were also unique to individual speaker experiences.

"One [of my works] is a poem about my grandma. It's describing basically a memory. One is just a poem about yogurt, which [I was inspired to write because] I feel like women do a lot of the domestic duties, though, I think it's getting better and better. The last one is a Persian or Arabic form that has been adopted all over the subcontinent," Serai said.

Not all of the speakers were poets. Presenters also included artist Ellen Reintjes who showcased a series of paintings, and author Joanna Choi Kalbus who read an excerpt from her book *The Boat Not Taken*.

"My book is a memoir, and it has to do with my mother and I coming to America [and] being assimilated to a new country. What inspired me is that I want my mother's progeny and my progeny to know the history of our family," Choi Kalbus said.

Prior to the event, speakers worked with LAC staff on techniques like rhythm and pacing in order to ensure that their words came across as they intended them to. However, each artist's creative process also contributed to how their passion came across to the audience.

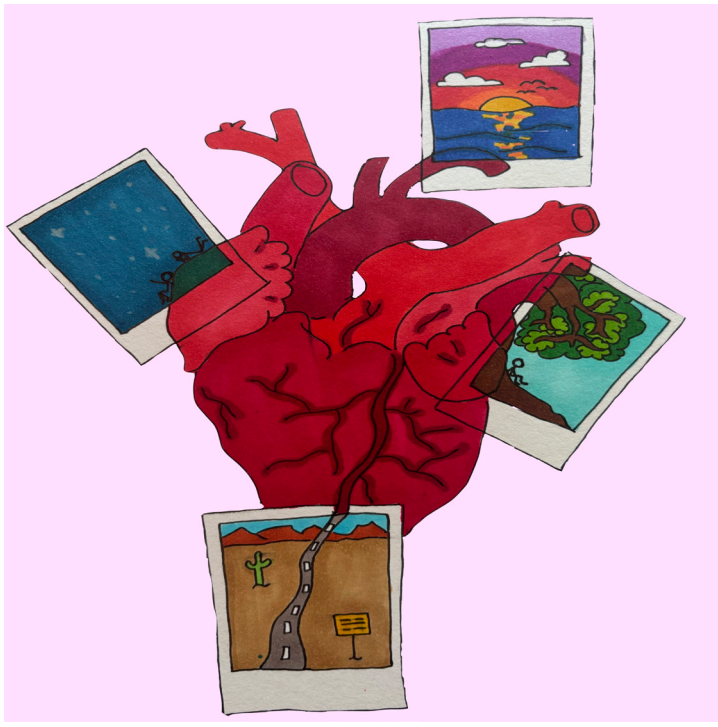
"We always go with the flow of what we're reading [and] go with the flow of the art… Somehow it all works out and I think it's because when people are truly accessing creativity … they've worked with it, they've fought with it, they've gotten angry with it, they've had fun with it … [and] they're creating an energy that I don't think can be shaped," O'Loskey said.

Many of the speakers were grateful for the opportunity to share their work.

"It's always really, really great to express myself through my writing … It's just really

Continued on 34

QUOTE OF THE ISSUE



"Debí tirar más fotos, de cuando te tuve / I should have taken more photos of when I had you" - "DtMF," Bad Bunny

Olivia Foster | Head Section Editor
Graphic by Sof Cerruti

The opening notes of global musician Bad Bunny's "DtMF" transport me to a state of untouchable nostalgia. I should have taken more photos of when I had you. I do not necessarily think of "you" as a person, but instead the times in my life when I look back smiling, and the person who I was in those moments is there too, smiling back at me.

For every listener, "you" can mean something different. "You" could be a person, a living, breathing thing, but it could also be a place or a physical object.

Yes, while the obvious message of the song is to take more photos of the things and people you love while you still have them, the deeper meaning, and the meaning that the artist himself has spoken about, is to appreciate what you love in your life while you have it.

Sometimes life changes slowly and you spend all your time wishing for something to happen. But sometimes things are so great in your life that you wish things would never change, that you could just exist frozen in time. We have accepted the reality that we do not dictate when change happens in our lives. Existing frozen in time is a beautiful fantasy, an exciting dream to entertain, but not a possibility.

In those times when we wish time would stop, I strive to remind myself of what I can control and what I cannot. Growing up, I have always told people that as much as I look back and miss parts of my life that have come to an end, I do not feel sad that those times will not exist in my present or future. I do not feel remorse towards those moments because I know the power of their existence in the past. The power of the past means that nobody can change those memories, and I know that I will protect and cherish them along the way of each new adventure upon which I embark on.

So, what I realize I can control in these moments of reflection is gratitude. Gratitude is a sentiment that I can always rely on to brighten my days. No matter what obstacles I have had to overcome, when I stop and think about what I have to be thankful for, the stress and the strife melt away.

Take more photos. That's a given. But in case you forget to bring your camera or you miss the chance to take a picture before the moment passes, know that the moment has not left you. Now I have come to understand that gratitude allows me to hold onto the moments that matter for as long as I should choose. As chapters of my life come to an end and I depart on new beginnings, I want to take the time to reflect and smile back at who I was because I know that it is she who shapes who I am becoming.

Book Nook

Celebrating women's history month

Spread by Audrey Martin

***Circe* by Madeline Miller**

Emily Roberts | Print Feature Editor

"I thought: I cannot bear this world a moment longer. Then, child, make another."

Madeline Miller's *Circe* is a captivating and lyrical reimagining of Greek mythology that explores power, identity, and the female experience. The novel follows the journey of Circe, the overlooked and underestimated daughter of Helios who feels out of place in her male dominated powerful family. When Circe discovers her gift of witchcraft, others see her newfound power as dangerous, and she is banished to a remote island by Zeus. There, Circe learns to survive on her own, embrace her independence, and confront the challenges of isolation. As Circe crosses paths with figures such as the Minotaur and Odysseus, her growing power provokes both gods and men, forcing her to defend what she holds dear.

Miller's retelling of the classic epics of Greek mythology reclaims a forgotten female voice and serves to remind readers of the power of women. Circe's transformation across the novel emphasizes the struggles and successes of women in male-dominated worlds and highlights the complexities of female identities. *Circe* is a must read novel that weaves together themes of autonomy and growth to better understand the female perspective.

***The Radium Girls* by Kate Moore**

Hannah Geraghty | Business Manager

"Radium, he determined, was dangerous. It was just that nobody told the girls…"

Kate Moore's *The Radium Girls* chronicles the history of women working with radium paint in factories during and after World War I. Initially in coveted, well-paying jobs, the women are envied by girls who see them coming home covered in glowing paint. However, they later begin experiencing severe, unexplainable injuries after years of working at the factories. What follows is the story of these women's fight to receive compensation for their illnesses while in the midst of a massive business scandal.

Moore's extensive research paints a gripping yet heartbreaking image of the women who died due to the betrayal of their employers. The painters are not just victims in her story, but focal points with complex traits, lives, and families, highlighting the tragedy that occurred realistically and respectfully. Her novel highlights an often overlooked part of history with lasting impacts on both women's and labor rights as well as the advancement of science. *The Radium Girls* honors these women's lives and is an essential read for Women's History Month.

***The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan**

Aamena Shipchandler | Print News Editor

"When she stopped conforming to the conventional picture of femininity, she finally began to enjoy being a woman."

The Feminine Mystique by Betty Friedan investigates the unfulfilled potential and dissatisfaction many housewives had in suburban America post-World War II. The novel was published in 1963 amidst the second wave of feminism throughout the U.S., Friedan uses interviews, research, and personal experiences to criticize the societal expectation of women finding fulfillment solely in the domestic sphere. The book argues that this limited societal role stifles women's intellectual growth and ambitions, with Friedan coining this issue as "the problem that has no name."

Friedan's writing played a critical role in sparking the growing wave of feminism at the time, encouraging women to seek opportunities and fulfillment beyond the household. However, despite this encouragement of women breaking free into independence, Friedan's perspective largely focuses on the circumstances of white, middle-class women, which overlooks the experiences of both women of color and working-class women. Despite this shortcoming, *The Feminine Mystique* continues to have a large impact on gender roles. The book's central message about autonomy, self-actualization, and independence remains extremely powerful and relevant today.

***The Testaments* by Margaret Atwood**

Zinnia Khan | DEIB Director

"I've become swollen with power, true, but also nebulous with it—formless, shape-shifting. How can I regain myself? How to shrink back to my normal size, the size of an ordinary woman?"

Prolific Canadian author Margaret Atwood's most recent work, *The Testaments*, is a sequel to her Arthur C. Clarke Award-winning novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. Set 15 years after the culminating events of *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Testaments* primarily follows Aunt Lydia, a character from the previous novel. In exploring Aunt Lydia's perspective throughout the story, I particularly appreciated the insight into a character that I had initially dismissed as a villain.

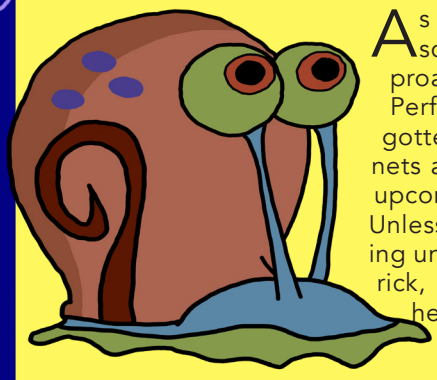
The Testaments pushes into uncomfortable but relevant territory, forcing readers to examine the social disparities between upper and lower-class women. Though men controlled Gilead, Atwood's imagined dystopian North America, the regime used certain women's participation in the patriarchy to lend it a form of legitimacy. Some upper-class women found success by contributing to the abuse of lower-class women, particularly the Handmaids. These socially powerful women are, in their own way, guilty of collectively supporting Gilead's theocratic regime. This element of the novel comments on the class disparities between upper and lower-class women when it comes to access to healthcare and bodily autonomy, making *The Testaments* a truly thought-provoking novel.

Behind the Scenes of Spongebob SquarePants: The Musical

Covering the arrangement of DramaDon's spring production

Noah Frankel and Trevor Krick | Staff Writers

Spread by Noah Frankel



As the end of the school year approaches, Acalanes Performing Arts have gotten out their jellyfish nets and spatulas for the upcoming spring play. Unless you have been living under a rock with Patrick, you have probably heard of this year's SpongeBob-themed production.

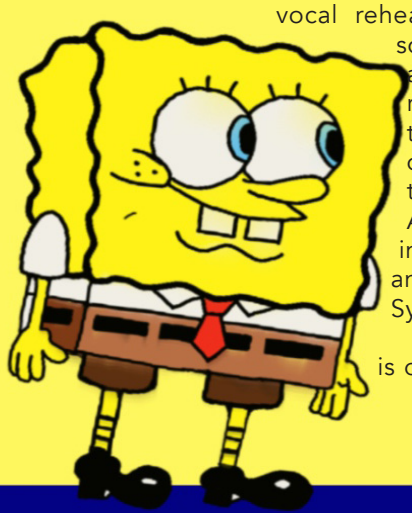
Acalanes Performing Arts might steal the show, and maybe the Krabby Patty Formula. From April 23 to 27 in the Performing Arts Center with their rendition of SpongeBob SquarePants: The Musical.

The director, producer, costume designer, and musical directors involved in the production chose the play. The selection of this year's musical can be attributed to its balance of fun and intricate elements.

"We were trying to find a piece that had a lot of people, a good message, and interesting design opportunities. [SpongeBob SquarePants: The Musical] has all of those," drama teacher and producer Ed Meehan said.

A production of this scale can take immense dedication and time. Many participants in the musical work daily to practice and improve.

"We have weekly and daily rehearsals from right after school at 3:30 to around 5:40, and on different days we do blocking, which means [performing] the scenes ... on Wednesdays, we do vocal rehearsals, for certain songs, and then we also do choreography on some of the [walkthrough] days. We just practice and practice," Acalanes Performing Arts member and sophomore Sydni Silver said



While the acting is often the center of attention, behind the scenes the stagecraft department spends hours making sets to take the play to the next level. The stage crew runs the show behind the curtains and makes sure everything comes together.

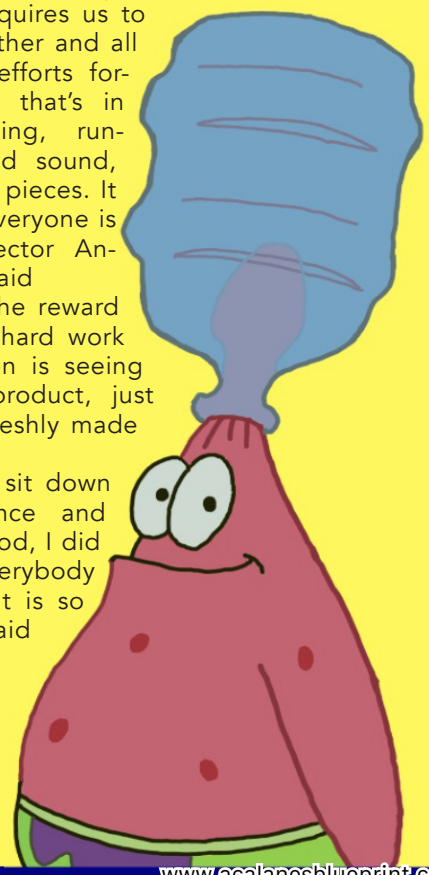
"We ask the directors what they require in a set, how many doors, and if they need platforms or levels, and then we take all that into account and design a set based on their needs," Head of Construction, Stage Manager and senior Stella Byrne said

Working with others in the production helps to foster a community within the Performing Arts department, as students from drama, chorus, and stagecraft collaborate to form a culture that rivals Bikini Bottom's.

"We're all working on this thing together, [where] we're making art together, [or] we're making this piece. So, the community is kind of built into the process," Meehan said.

This community-building process does not only strengthen bonds between peers, but it facilitates a smooth-running play.

"Theatre requires us to rely on each other and all put our best efforts forward, whether that's in singing, dancing, running lights and sound, or building set pieces. It only works if everyone is invested," director Andie Patterson said



For many, the reward for the crew's hard work and preparation is seeing the finished product, just like eating a freshly made Krabby Patty.

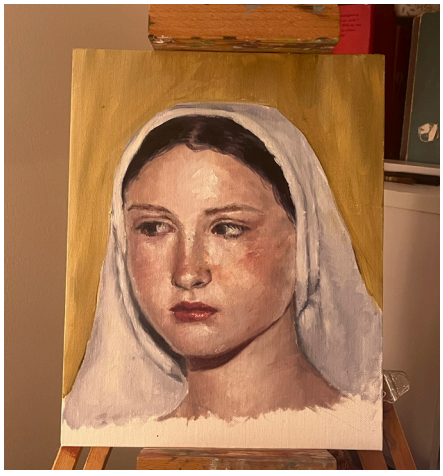
"It's cool to sit down in the audience and think, oh my God, I did that...And everybody else says, 'That is so cool,'" Byrne said

ARTIST OF THE ISSUE

Taylor Baker, the master of many mediums

Tselmeg Orgilmunkh and Natalie Pecci | Staff Writers

Courtesy photo by Taylor Baker



Acalanes offers a wide range of artistic opportunities through courses and clubs. Junior Taylor Baker has taken advantage of them while continuing her creativity beyond school. She participates in numerous creative outlets, including animation, drama, crochet, nail art, and digital art.

Baker has had a passion for art since a young age, where she self-taught herself craftwork. She has continued to grow her passion and skills over the years.

"I have had an interest in art since I was a really little kid, maybe first [grade] or kindergarten. In third grade, I taught myself how to crochet via YouTube videos. I started taking dedicated art classes around fifth grade to the seventh or eighth grade," Baker said. "From then on, I've been doing art independently until I started taking Art 2, this past junior year. I've always had an interest in art, and I've just kind of picked up new skills as I go."

Art empowers Baker to bring her ideas to life. Baker's appreciation of art has driven her to push herself to continue to grow.

"Art gives me a creative outlet. It's something I can do that's productive. I have something to show for at the end of the day, and I really just love being able to create. I love having the kind of power at my fingertips to bring something new into this world. I love getting better at it," Baker said.

Baker joined the art program at Acalanes this year, taking the course Art 2, where she showcased her experience and skills. Some of which include excellent hand and eye coordination, the ability to receive feedback from others well, self-awareness, and reflective criticism of her work and the work of others.

"Taylor has been a very gifted artist. She takes instruction very well. I find that she is very aware of the things that I am teaching, the skills and techniques already. A lot of it is not that I have to teach her, but I'm more guiding her and offering some little things along the way," 2D art teacher Robert Porter said.

The hard work and dedication Baker possesses shines through in her work. Some people feel that her own personality and flair are reflected in her artwork.

"She puts a lot of her own style into her art and shows her vision in her art, which I think is really cool," Baker's classmate and junior Addison Burton said.

In addition to her artistic skills, her familiarity with the history of art led many to feel this makes her an engaging person to talk with.

"I can ask seemingly random questions about art or artists, and she'll know it. I can tell she's done a lot of reading on her own and understands a lot more than a typical art student about art history, art theory, and criticism. It's a pleasure working with someone like that," Porter said.

Beyond Baker's art skills, many appreciate her collaborative and dependable qualities as a student and classmate in the theater.

"She works well with others, and she's really good in a group. She's someone that you can really count on, as a performer and as a person. You know she's not going to let you down ever, and she's always going to be there," drama teacher Ed Meehan said.

In Baker's drama class, some observe she has developed self-assurance and a sense of belonging on stage.

"Taylor is just a very natural actor, and she's very confident and comfortable on stage," Meehan said.

Baker is also a member of the Crochet Club, where her peers feel she has made a significant impact through her kindness and inspired her fellow members. Some consider her hardworking and believe it is apparent in her crocheting and work-life balance.

"I think she's one of the most talented crocheters I know, and I love seeing her wear all her clothes that she crochets at school. She's a very hard worker. I know that she loves to spend time with arts and crafts as well as academics, and I think she's very cool for finding a balance between the two," Vice President of Crochet Club and sophomore Daphne Dale said. "Taylor is such a great inspiration to all of our club members. It's great spending time with her. She's a really nice person, and she's always happy to help other people."

In addition to the various art classes and clubs, Baker sells nails to other students and members of the community.

"I think Taylor is super talented, and her creativity and ideas show through her nail art. I would purchase [a nail set] again, and I recommend purchasing to a lot of people. She is super organized and helpful when making and selling nails," nail art customer and junior Maya Shoenhair said. "[Baker] has many options and will make the nails however you want. I can see her passion through her art, from the amount of time she spends on them."

Baker hopes to continue with art in the future, professionally. Even if she pursues a different career, she hopes to continue creating art.

"I really want to go to college for animation or a fine arts degree and then continue with a career in animation or game design. Even if I don't continue along those career paths, I really want to do art independently. I want to do art in my spare time because it's a great creative outlet for me," Baker said.

Drawing from her own experiences, Baker wishes to become a role model that others look up to through her art, just as she saw those do before her.

"I hope to inspire others to do art. The reason I started doing art was because I saw other people doing art, and I wanted to be able to create like they were able to create. I wanted to push myself to get better and be at their level and then beyond," Baker said. "I want somebody to see my art and hope that they can do that one day and push themselves to create, to learn, and to put in the effort to bring something new into this world."

RECIPE OF THE ISSUE

Circus Animal Sugar Cookies

Aamena Shipchandler and Molly Jones | Print News Editor and Print Photo Story Editor

Photo by Aamena Shipchandler

These colorful cookies are sure to give you your share of sugary delight. Soft, chewy sugar cookies filled with crunchy animal cookies and sprinkles, these fun treats are perfect for parties, celebrations, or just enjoying as a delicious dessert.

Ingredients:

1 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
2 large eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon cream of tartar
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 cups chopped circus animal cookies
1/4 cup nonpareil sprinkles
2 cups white chocolate chips
Pink food coloring (to your liking)

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350℉. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Combine butter with sugar, and beat on medium speed until well creamed together.
3. Add the eggs and vanilla extract. Mix the butter and sugar until the eggs are well beaten.
4. In a separate bowl, combine the remaining dry ingredients. Slowly add this mixture to the batter and beat at medium to low speed until most of the flour is incorporated. Add the chopped circus animal cookies and sprinkles, little by little, and mix to combine. Increase the speed of the mixer and beat until the dough comes together.
5. Portion the dough into balls and place on the prepared baking sheet about an inch or two apart.
6. Bake at 350℉, for 10-12 minutes. Allow to cool on the baking sheet for several minutes and then transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.
7. Optional: add a chocolate drizzle. In a bowl, melt white chocolate in intervals until melted. Add in the food coloring of your choice, or leave it plain. Fill a small piping or plastic bag with the mixture and cut the corner off. Drizzle over cookies and allow to set.

RUEBNERS RECORDS

Cole Ruebner | Contributing Writer

***Blueprint** would like to disclaim that this article contains mentions of suicide.*

My favorite song is from a video game. That is no joke. It is called "I Really Want to Stay at Your House," and it is from Cyberpunk 2077. It is a glitzy techno ballad with heavy vocal effects and unintelligible lyrics - pretty far removed from my normal music taste. Do I think it has better lyrics than a Kendrick Lamar song? No. Do I think it has better instrumentation than a Stevie Wonder song? No. But it is my favorite song of all time.

One of my friend's favorite songs is "Money Machine" by 100 Gecs. If you haven't heard this, I highly recommend you check it out. I cannot guarantee that you will like it, but I can guarantee that it is unlike anything you have ever heard before. When I asked her why she liked it so much, that was the answer she gave. It is weird, out there and full of energy, and so is she. She told me that when she listens to it she does not care what anybody else thinks.

One of my mom's favorite songs is "The Luckiest" by Ben Folds. Her brother, and my uncle, took his own life earlier this year, and she says that he used to sing karaoke to this song. She had shown me Ben Folds's music a long time ago, and at the time it very much was not my thing. I found this type of music to be a bit bland for my taste. Now I cannot help but tear up when I listen to it.

My grandfather's favorite song is "What a Wonderful World" by Bob Thiele. In his old age, he is starting to develop dementia, and he rocks the old-man humor pretty well. He is rarely serious and always making self-deprecating jokes - at every single party he remarks "This is the best party I've ever been to." He is serious sometimes though. Whenever you ask him how he is, he simply responds "I'm happy." Then, he sings this song. My uncle often sang it with him.

So, why is my favorite song from a video game? I love this song because it makes me feel like myself. Eagle-eyed readers will notice that I do not go to Acalanes anymore. I transferred schools prior to my junior year, but I was extremely lucky to have been asked to continue writing this column. Even though my life has changed so much, this song reminds me of what I left behind. After all, I had first discovered it with my friends from Acalanes. At my new school, nobody knows what it is. I remember driving through an open road trying to sing along to the unintelligible lyrics of the chorus, and feeling like nothing had changed. It is a time capsule into a life very different from the one I am leading right now.

My favorite question to ask people is "What is your favorite song?" Not "What is the best song," but "What is your favorite song?" You can learn a lot about a person from this simple question, and it is part of the reason I love writing about music so much. Music is a window into the soul, providing a much clearer picture of who someone is than a lot of more tangible means. I remember sitting down with Acalanes Principal Eric Shawn in my sophomore year and asking him what his favorite album was for an article. He gave me *Neutral Milk Hotel's In the Aeroplane Over the Sea* (which has since become one of my favorites as well). He told me about what made the instrumentation and lyrics so great, and then talked in depth about how he would go camping with his friends and sing songs from it around the campfire. I saw his face light up as he shared those stories.

So, what's the point? If you're meeting someone new, I highly encourage you to ask them the question "What is your favorite song?" They might say that it's "Hammer Smashed Face" by Cannibal Corpse, or they might say that it's "Serenade in B-flat major" by Mozart. No matter what it is I guarantee there is a story behind it. That is what makes music so special.

LA MODE: ALTERNATIVE INFLUENCES

The Importance of Alternative Ideology in Mainstream Trends

Aya O'Neal, Cara Hamilton, Gwyneth Lee, and Olivia Silverstein | Online Content Manager and Staff Writers
Spread by Olivia Silverstein

Despite what many may believe, alternative fashion is not rooted in dark colors and edgy styles, but an ideology of challenging societal norms through the sourcing of pieces and creative liberties. Today, the alt-culture is running rampant, with teens embracing thrifting, home- made clothing, and durable pieces.

Alternative fashion originated in the mid-20th century, with trends such as Beatniks, Rockers, Hippies, and Punks. At the center of these fashion choices was a love for music, arts, and an outlet for social transgression. It is no new fact that styles go through a cycle, and certain recently popularized alt subgroups like punk or Y2K have contributed to a new wave of teens learning about and expressing themselves through alternative fashion.

"There's always been a pattern of newer generations reusing fashion styles, music, or whatever from the previous generation and romanticizing it, so I'm not surprised that a lot of things from the 70s, and 80s are starting to come back now. I really love being able to take stuff from the past and get to wear it," sophomore Ella Meewes said.

For others, their fashion choices may not be considered alternative, but it still acts as a way for them, as high school students, to make trendy pieces for less and be more environmentally conscious. This ideology has been rooted in alternative-subcultures since their upbringing.

"I love the creative liberty it brings me ... it's reusing in a way where it doesn't feel wasteful. When I like some parts of [an item] so much, and then [I think] some things [are] wrong with it, I can just make it both something cool and something I wear," frosh Jayden Diprisco said.

Social media has also been a defining factor in the resurgence of alternative apparel. Newer generations tend to shape aspects of culture like clothing around politics and media, and our generation is no outlier. Deviating from the culture of fast fashion and owning one's individual style or aesthetic is our generation's way of self-expression.

"More people have really wanted to express themself, and people have been breaking away from trends so they can put their own personal spin on things," senior Bee Reinsburg said.

Alternative subcultures of fashion have allowed youth to develop a deeper sense of self through the expression of outfits and appearance, providing teens with a community of like-minded peers with similar political and social ideals.

"After the pandemic, we started heading toward a counterculture movement, and it started with alternative fashion and kind of continued into exploring other subcultures and since that popularized, it made its way into mainstream fashion," junior Everest Tomasello said.

The Community Canvas: An Exploration of Local Public Art

Diving into the Lafayette Public Art Committee's WOW series and highlighting local artwork

Maddyx Bride, Sophie Gold, Jenna Kessler, Noah Frankel, and Trevor Krick | Head Copy Editor, Business Managers, and Staff Writers
Graphics by Jenna Kessler and Noah Frankel

Birdhouses adorn the back of street signs, sculptures poke out among the trees, and murals decorate buildings around Lafayette. None of this would be possible without the help of artists in the community.

Lafayette Public Art Committee Vice Chair Janice Peacock presented the history of the public art collection in Lafayette on March 12 as a part of the Wonders of the World (WOW) speaker series at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center.

Public art has a unique role as it can reach broader audiences than traditional art in institutions, allowing more people to experience art on a regular basis.

"Public art is a work that, as the name implies, invites the public to participate in it. These tend to be works that are larger in scale, that are engaging in a way that is a little more open and democratic. You don't necessarily need to understand much about art," art teacher Robert Porter said. "The artworks tend to be easier to interact with. They're not in a gallery or a museum, so they're more easily approached, both physically and sort of conceptually too. They tend to engage the viewer in a way that a museum or gallery can't."

At the presentation, Peacock walked attendees through the diverse landscape of Lafayette's public art collection.

"We have seven works of art, mostly sculptures in the downtown Lafayette area. So, I virtually walked [through] the seven downtown sculptures and the other sculptures that are more far afield in other parts of Lafayette. Then I talked to them about some of the other paintings and sculptures that live inside of the Lafayette Library and Learning Center," Peacock said.

WOW, one of the many programs the Friends of the Lafayette Library and Learning Center funds, educates community members about art and more for free.

"[WOW] was a program approved by the board of the Friends of the Lafayette Library and Learning Center in 2012. [We] arrange for speakers, they're usually docents, who come from typically art museums or other related venues. Sometimes they're independent speakers, and they give a lecture once a month for about eight months at the Lafayette Library [Learning Center] on a Wednesday afternoon," WOW Committee Member Ellen Reintjes said.

The WOW series features a wide variety of speakers ranging from museum docents to gardeners, working to appeal to their audiences.

"We look at the various museums in the area, and then we look at other art or gardens or things like that that we think would be interesting to our audience… we thought it would be interesting to have a speaker come and describe these works and how the process gets carried out by the city…" Reintjes said. "Many times people actually do go to the exhibits and they will come to lecture before they're going, so they will have learned more about what's going to be there when they get there."

Lafayette's public art installations often require extensive planning and collaboration between various groups.

"The process of doing the public art project is a long dialogue with the developer, the art committee, and the city council. It's often a tug of war of what's possible, what can happen within the time you have, what you can possibly think of, what's safe, and what's engineered … The architects and safety codes have a lot to say about it," public art contributor Ben Trautman said.

Many of the public art works in Lafayette are on private property where developers installed them.

"We work with real estate developers, and [we] give one percent of their budget, when it is a big enough project, to public art. They then install public art somewhere on their property that is in view of the public," Peacock said. "The [Public Art Committee] has a lot of artists that we have vetted and we recommended, so a lot of the time the developers will come to us and say they need an artist. We will work with them to choose the right kind of art for the location."

2013 Lafayette's Citizen of the Year, Greg Moeller, started the "birdhouse movement." He installs birdhouses and metal quails on the back of street signs around Lafayette as well as donates them to charities.

"At first I bought [birdhouses] online, but they weren't that great. So over

time I learned how to make them myself. Then I started putting up quails [on the street signs], and now they are all over," Moeller said.

Moeller, like other public art contributors, hopes to add beauty and joy to the community.

"The primary goal in all of this is just to provide a bit of cheer and kindness and maybe give the town a little character… It is just a little hobby of mine. Everyone truly seems to love them … My primary thing is to hopefully provide a little cheer or smile to someone's day, and I love nature and the idea that the birds use them," Moeller said.

Other public art around Lafayette is on loan or part of a temporary gallery.

"We strive for all public art in Lafayette to be permanent. Some are rented or on loan for a couple of years, but most of the time we are looking for art that will be around for many many decades. We do temporary exhibits at the [Don] Tatzin Hall [near the] Lafayette Library [Learning Center,] which actually has a lot of Acalanes art in it right now," Peacock said.

Lara Dutto, architect, artist, educator, and community advocate, is behind the design of Lafayette's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Mural. She inspired the creative direction of Lara-architecture and now serves as an adjunct professor in the Architecture Department at Diablo Valley College. As an artist and architect, Dutto navigates both worlds by producing artwork and housing.

"Many of us looked for ways to make our community more welcoming to people of color and people from different socioeconomic backgrounds. As an architect, I know that much of the solution can be found in creating missing middle and affordable housing. But I also hoped that a mural like this, so centrally located, could serve as a beacon of love and light, a welcome sign, of sorts," Dutto said.

Another example of public art in Lafayette is the bronze sculpture of teetering books that resides in the plaza behind the Lafayette Library. Titled "Speechless," artist Brian Goggins's artwork captures the essence of literature, with bronze pages strung high

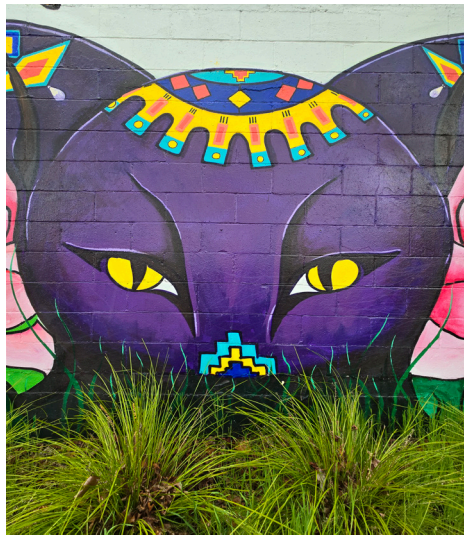
above the plaza.

Goggins's piece is approximately the height of one page from each book in the library, all stacked on top of each other. The work is a visual representation of the freedom of learning. Acalanes students hold similar perspectives, who described art as expressing feelings and emotions in ways beyond talking.

"We make stuff. That's a need for some people. We have our own opinions, and you want to express your opinions. People love talking, right? Art is just one of those ways to talk," Youth Ambassador for the Lamorinda Arts Council, AP Art student, and senior Emily Bennett said.

For many community members, public art not only provides decoration but also an outlet for creativity and culture.

"I think public art adds significant value to the Lafayette community. Not only does public art beautify and enliven spaces, public art provides a conduit for individuals to express their idiosyncratic beliefs, ideas, and perspectives to the community. I think



that kind of artistic and emotional diversity is necessary for a thriving community," senior Julia Kinion said.

For others, public art helps define and uplift communities.

"[The importance of public art is] to give a community a little more character and a little more identity. A little bit of differentiation and also just to provide some pleasing scenery as you drive around … I look around at the public art that is up, and I look at the beautiful buildings and the traffic doesn't really bother me so much because it is all such a vibrant little downtown and so charming [with] the tree-lined streets. I just love all of that," Moeller said.

Public art has the potential to spruce up community spaces when integrated throughout buildings and residential areas.

"When art is done really well, I think it brings people in, and it makes people excited about a public space. [Art] generally improves the feeling of our landscape and our cities … I think it makes people stop and appreciate the world a little bit more," Trautman said.

Applying to college can be challenging!
We help students from 8th to 12th grade navigate the confusing college admissions process, giving them a step-by-step breakdown of the application tasks and helping them build a pathway to a top-tier university.
La Porte
Education Advising
Since 2012
www.lpeducationadvising.com
contact@lpeducationadvising.com
(650) 766-0969
Serving students from Acalances, Campolindo, and Miramonte for over ten years.
• Strategic college lists
• Unique extracurriculars
• Stand out essays
• Much more
Book a Free Consultation

Power of Poetry For Progress

Continued from 24

fun, and the audience that I've experienced here at the theater have always been so supportive and just fantastic people. The Lamorinda Arts Council and the sponsors, you can tell they're really interested in trying to promote arts for the community, and I appreciate that a lot. It makes me really honored to be a part of it," Granat said.

The poets had various reasons for choosing this art form to express themselves.

"I am a Sikh, [and] our religious book is like a big poem. So, I think there is a lot of influence from there for sure. I felt like… all these experiences want to come out and be told and recorded, and [poetry] was the form that made sense to me," Serai said.

Not all of the speakers had experience presenting their art to an audience, but some noted that the audience's support helped them gain confidence.

"Since this was my first reading, I was a bit nervous, but as I read my piece, I felt all the … feelings that I put into the written word. I just flowed with it, and I appreciated the audience giving me really mochel claps. I really enjoyed reading to you," Choi Kalbus said.

Organizers emphasized the importance of events like these to uplift women's voices, especially since the event took place on International Women's Day.

"If we don't keep ideas about women's history and what's happening in the past, present, and future alive, who will? It's up to women and others who value what women contribute to the world to do that; it's our privilege, really," O'Loskey said.

By spotlighting women's voices in the present, speakers also aimed to honor unseen contributions of women throughout history.

"Our worth goes beyond washing dishes and taking care of children, which is great and honorable in and of itself, but there's so much more that women have contributed to society and that needs to be known. International Women's Day for me gives us a chance to give voices to not only ourselves but to the women of the past who've had so much to offer this world," Granat said.

Some speakers seek to lift the women of today up by celebrating all genres of the female experience.

"I feel like [it is valuable to] make an attempt to record [women's lives] as we move into the future [and] have more discussion spaces. Everyone lives in very different ways, and it's not an attempt to have a homogenous experience but to see all the different experiences that we might not see in our current history," Serai said.

LAC hopes that with future events, the "Art Embraces Poetry" program will continue to gain traction and reach new audiences.

"We are always amazed at how well it turns out … We're told over and over how glad [people] are that they came and how they're going to bring their daughter or their neighbor or whoever it is to the next event," O'Loskey said.

Looking forward, April is National Poetry Month, and LAC, along with other local art organizations, plan to host more events featuring accomplished and emerging poets.

"[Poetry for the Ages is a] collaborative program [operated by] the Lafayette Public Art Committee, Town Hall Theatre, and Lamorinda Arts Council … They always have an April national poetry month program as well, so there are two programs that [LAC is] involved in. One is usually at the beginning of April, and one is at the end of April," O'Loskey said.

Go to Blueprint *online to see video recap of the event!*

TREXAIR
AVIATION ACADEMY

YOUR NEXT CLASSROOM.

Fast-Track Your Way To A
High-Flying Pilot Career

TREXAIR.COM

FIRSTMILE
CYCLE WORKS
SPECIALIZED

Everything you need to get started in the sport, or take it to the next level

Quick, meticulous maintenance

Rentals, Group Rides, Camps & Clinics

925.385.7072
www.firstmilecycle.com

3566 Mt. Diablo Blvd.
Lafayette, CA 94549

BAY AREA WINDOWS

Contact us for your dream doors, windows, and skylights
bayareawindows.com

BAY AREA WINDOWS

Unmasking America's Mental Health

Combating national stigma surrounding mental health disorders

Neve Murphy | Print Opinion Editor

Graphic by Audrey Martin

Blueprint would like to disclaim that this article contains a mention of suicide and substance abuse

Recent data has shown that America is facing a crisis in mental health. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one-fifth of Americans experienced symptoms of anxiety or depression in 2023. That is a larger population than the number of Americans that get the flu each year, and numbers are only rising.

This crisis has been a growing issue in America since the 1960s, and modern national issues only exacerbate the issue. The COVID-19 pandemic triggered job insecurity, sickness and death of family members, and anxiety regarding the ability of our country to get back on track as well as widespread isolation. Before the onset of the pandemic, stressors like economic instability and an increase in availability of drugs fueled this crisis.

The pressing concern of this crisis lies not only in the widespread nature of mental health disorders, but in the unfortunate consequences of these disorders. Deaths from drugs and alcohol, two common means of coping with mental health struggles, and suicide doubled between 2000 and 2017.

This data reflects not only the prominence of mental health disorders, but the lack of treatment for them. According to a 2021 Forbes article, only 45 percent of Americans with clinical-level mental health disorders seek treatment. This data stems from a survey where respondents reported their symptoms and their experience with treatment. There are a number of barriers to mental health treatment such as lack of insurance or economic means to acquire support and lack of knowledge or access to pathways for treatment. However, only 17 percent reported an economic obstacle and 34 percent lack of knowledge. The rest were deterred by fear of others finding out about their condition or a belief that they could not be helped by America's mental health system.

This fear that prevents people from seeking help when they need it is referred to as stigma or prejudice towards those facing mental health conditions which people can internalize and in turn can influence their decisions. Public perceptions of mental health disorders can often be inaccurate of the lived experience of an individual with these disorders and the science behind their brain. Some people believe that those with mental health disorders act irrational at all times and thus should fear these individuals. Others believe that these disorders are merely ploys for attention. According to a 2007 CDC study, only 25 percent of individuals with mental health conditions believed people are "caring and sympathetic" to them.

Opinions on mental health treatment also vary as some believe these individuals are incapable of reform and thus treatment is pointless, while others hold the view that mental health conditions are superficial conditions and treatment is unnecessary.

This stigma exists not only in the eyes of the general public but among individuals struggling with mental health and can deter them from seeking care. Negative views can lead individuals to hide their disorder instead of reaching out. In other instances, these stigmas convince people that treatment is ineffective or unnecessary.

These beliefs were not imagined by the public on its own. They have largely stemmed from the way policymakers and the psychiatric industry frames disorders and their responses to them.

The early form of standardized treatment for those suffering from mental disorders was institutionalization. State-run psychiatric hospitals, beginning in the 1800s, used inhumane treatments and mandated care. These hospitals faced pushback from social reform groups of the mid-19th century and states began closing facilities in 1955.

In an effort to accommodate these closures and provide more ethical forms of treatment to patients, President John F. Kennedy signed into law the Community Mental Health Act on Oct. 13, 1963. This act was designed to create 1,500 accessible mental health care centers with the goal of rehabilitation rather than confinement.

These government and grassroots ini-

tiatives motivated the closure of many state-run facilities. Unfortunately, Kennedy was assassinated only weeks after this bill was passed and the act never materialized. Meanwhile, the 1965 Medicaid Act, which provided national health coverage for low income individuals, took pressure off of state hospitals and placed it on the federal government, leading to further state bans on asylums. This left individuals with few pathways for treatment.

Since Kennedy's term, few presidents have made committed efforts to initiate similar reforms. The Heritage Foundation, a non-profit public policy research institute dedicated to finding solutions to the mental health crisis, found that the number of beds available in psychiatric care units dropped by 95 percent from the beginning of bans on state facilities in 1955 to 2016.

Since the 1800s, mediums of care continue to criminalize and confine those with mental disorders. The lack of access to care allows these individuals to slip through the cracks. Currently, the three largest health care providers in the nation are all jails. This reaffirms the idea established by the asylum system that those suffering from mental illnesses are dangers to society and may motivate others to mask their symptoms to dissociate with these prejudices.

The quality of discussion surrounding national mental health care has only dropped under President Trump's second administration. Trump's views on mental policy began during his campaign. A video from his campaign website refers to those with mental health disorders as "dangerously deranged" and says they should be forced into "mental institutions where they belong." This rhetoric contributes to ideas about those suffering from mental illnesses as being violent and dangerous. This makes Americans want to hide their struggles so as to separate themselves from these portrayals.

These plans serve only to harm those suffering from mental health and ideas about them while providing no legitimate support. National institutionalization is not feasible as mental hospitals are a state matter and states outlawed their use over 60 years ago.

Additionally, the Trump administration has displayed a lack of initiative to prioritize mental health care. The government-wide cuts the Department of Government Efficiency task force initiated have made significant reductions to the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). According to CBS News, these cuts included firing around 10 percent of the staff, a large number of which worked with the 988 hotline, the national crisis hotline that Americans can call when they or someone they know may be a danger to themselves. The majority of fired workers came from the hotline's communication team, responsible for spreading public awareness of the hotline.

These cuts convey that SAMHSA is not a program that the government wishes to prioritize and relays the idea that these disorders are not serious health concerns demanding treatment. Additionally, the cuts to the crisis hotline further discourage people from reaching out for help.

The problems surrounding mental health treatment in America lie not only in the national availability and advocacy for treatment, but in the industry dedicated to supporting mental health. In recent years, psychiatrists have shifted from counseling to medicating. The typical 45 minute sessions where patients talk through their conditions and the factors behind them has transitioned to 15 minute evaluations that often end in psychiatrists writing prescriptions. According to the American Psychology Association, use of second-generation antipsychotics, a kind of psychiatric medication, tripled between 1995 and 2008. This change was brought on by developments in neuroscience and an emphasis on developing medications to manipulate the brain and the decline in the number of therapists in recent years.

Psychiatrist Dr. Steve Balt observed this trend when he entered the profession in the mid-2000s, reporting in an NPR interview that he "was surprised to find that there were few opportunities to provide therapy. In fact, most of my sessions were 15 or 20-minute sessions, particularly when I worked in a public community health clinic where I had very little time to ask anything other than how the medications are working, what symptoms is this person experiencing, rushing to a diagnosis in order to get paid for the visit, and sending them off with a prescription for a medication."

These medications can be ineffective. They can take extended periods of time to reach a balance in a patient's system and oftentimes when this does happen, the patient starts to develop a tolerance, and the dose has to be increased regularly to combat their symptoms. Additionally, due to the short evaluation sessions, patients are often misdiagnosed or prescribed the wrong medication or dosage to treat their disorder. A study by the University Medical Center Utrecht found that, out of 75 sample patients, 46.7 percent were identified to have experienced "potentially inappropriate prescribing" of psychiatric medication, reporting a margin of error of nearly 50 percent.

Not only can this treatment be inadequate in treating individuals, it can also reaffirm ideas that those suffering from mental illnesses should suppress their conditions and symptoms. Therapy sessions which used to be a safe space for patients to freely discuss their struggles have shifted to evaluations in many practices, further preventing patients from feeling like they can publically share their symptoms or disorder.

This growing epidemic deserves more recognition and response. Despite the attempts of the federal government to take more responsibility for mental health treatment from state governments, they have taken minimal action to address the mental health crisis. Without federal action, states continue to hold the power. State-run prisons have only replaced the mental hospitals closed in the mid 1900s. State legislatures should work to provide more pathways for care for all individuals to slow growing incarceration rates. Individuals with mental health disorders deserve support, not punishment.

Additionally, combating national stigma of mental health disorders starts locally. Initiating open discussion about mental illness refutes the idea that it is a topic that one must keep to themselves. Managing symptoms of mental health disorders is a challenge that should not be taken on independently. Individuals should find support in their community. The reality is that mental health disorders are abundant and growing in American society, and individuals suffering should not feel ostracized from society or isolated in dealing with these issues. We must provide personal pathways for support to our community while legitimate pathways remain scarce.

The Plague of Perfectionism

Unpacking the societal pressure that fuel perfectionism and hinder genuine relationships

Maddie Obertello | Staff Writer

Graphic by Hank Bauer

I once believed that perfection was the key to a strong relationship and that flawless moments with those I loved would bring us closer. However, the more I chased perfection, the more I realized I had hindered connections.

Chasing perfection in relationships creates unrealistic expectations, leading to strained connections and emotional exhaustion. The concept of perfection is influenced by media portrayals that depict effortless, conflict-free, dreamlike relationships. In turn, we internalize these depictions and allow them to form our expectations of our own relationships, making us believe that anything less than flawless means failure.

This pressure to be perfect can also be seen in everyday interactions. In friendships, there's often an expectation to be available, supportive, and never show weakness. In family relationships, the idea that there should be no conflict or that everything must be harmonious can lead to suppressed emotions and unresolved issues. Even in casual conversations, there's often pressure to present oneself in the best possible light, hiding struggles or imperfections to meet perceived expectations.

The pressure to maintain an idealized image has increased drastically over the years. A study conducted by the American Psychological Association found that between 1989 and 2016, self-oriented perfectionism increased by ten percent, while socially prescribed perfectionism - the belief that others expect perfection from you - rose by 33 percent. This rise can be attributed to a growing emphasis on achievement and success, societal expectations of perfection, and the constant pressure to meet unrealistic standards set by peers, family, and media. This comparison-driven mindset causes individuals to feel inadequate, as they measure their worth against others' curated images. This can easily lead to a cycle of self-criticism and emotional burnout.

A study by the National Institute of Mental Health found that individuals with perfectionist tendencies are at a higher risk of experiencing chronic stress and emotional exhaustion. The study also revealed that 40 percent of people with perfectionism struggle to meet their own high standards, which leads to continuous feelings of failure and frustration. These unmet expectations contribute to stress, as individuals are constantly trying to achieve unrealistic standards. This ongoing pressure can eventually lead to burnout, as it is difficult to sustain the emotional energy required to meet unrealistic goals over time.

As we continue to chase perfection, the impact on our mental health and relationships becomes evident. According to *Forbes*, 68 percent of individuals believe that perfectionism ultimately leads to burnout, as the relentless pursuit of flawlessness takes an emotional toll. This cycle of striving for unattainable ideals leaves little room for rest or self-compassion. Additionally, 66 percent of people acknowledge that perfectionism fosters a fear of failure, leading to conflict avoidance. This can hinder open communication and problem-solving within relationships, as individuals tend to avoid confrontation or difficult conversations to maintain the illusion of perfection. As a result, relationships often suffer from unresolved issues and unmet needs, further deepening the emotional strain.

The National Library of Medicine also explains that, "when people make evaluations, they do so in relation to a pertinent norm or standard. To describe oneself as tall, for example, implies that one is taller than others." This idea is central to perfectionism, as individuals constantly compare

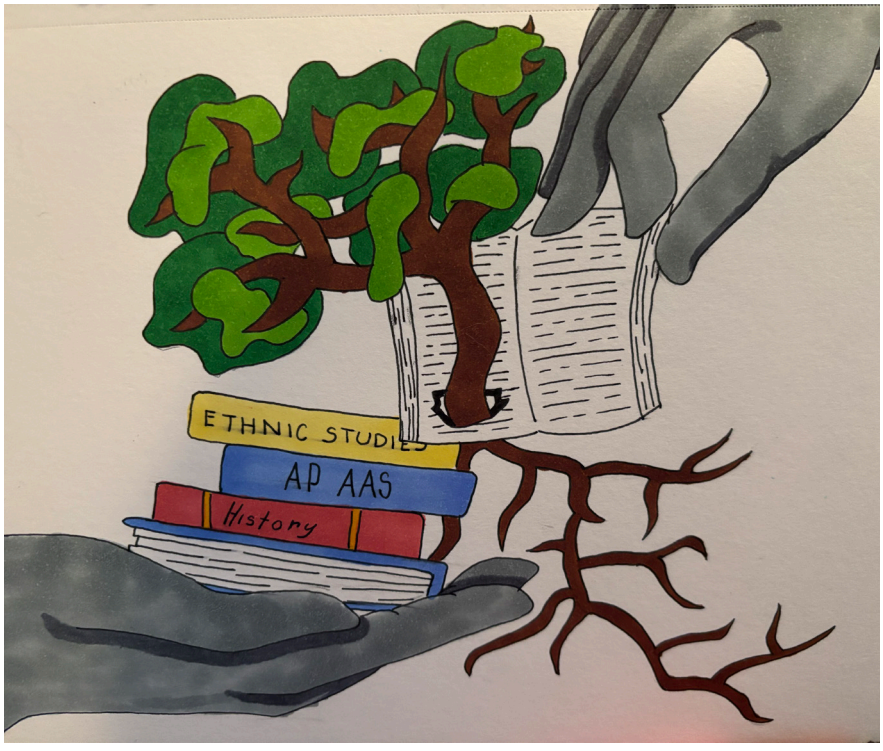
Continued on 40

Using Education to Fight Adversity

Exploring the role of education in connecting the legacy of slavery to contemporary issues

Mila Ellis | Staff Writer

Graphic by Sof Cerruti



This year, Acalanes introduced Ethnic Studies as a required course for all sophomores and African American Studies as an elective Advanced Placement (AP) class. As a student taking both, I went into this year expecting a historical depiction of underrepresented cultures and their contributions. Now, having nearly completed both courses, I can confidently say that the knowledge I gained was transformative, deepening my understanding of not only historical events, but also contemporary issues. More than anything, I now advocate for the courses and encourage others to explore and appreciate ethnic studies, especially during a time when their value seems to be up for debate.

On January 12, 2023, the Florida Department of Education issued a letter to the College Board, revealing their decision to exclude AP African American Studies from the state's course directory. They argued that the content was contrary to Florida law, lacked educational value, and was historically inaccurate. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed the Individual Freedom Act on April 22, 2022. The legislation was part of a broader goal to prohibit instruction that could make white students feel responsible or guilty for the actions of members of their race. In action, the Florida State Board of Education has since released a new history standard, in which public schools must teach how the institution of slavery provided some Black people with skills that could be applied for personal benefit.

Additionally, since taking office, President Donald Trump has issued a series of executive orders aimed at eliminating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs on a national level and what he refers to as "racial indoctrination." On January 20, 21, and 29 Trump issued orders to revoke DEI initiatives in federal hiring and contracting, eliminate race and sex-based preferences, and ban race-based teachings in schools, arguing they promote division over unity.

Contrary to the beliefs of state and federal governments, these courses must be taught and students must learn their topics, as they remain a part of American society today. One of the most complex topics I examined in my African American Studies class was slavery. Studying it from multiple perspectives made it clear that slavery's impact did not end with the 13th Amendment. Despite its official abolishment in 1865, the beliefs and systems that once upheld slavery did not disappear. Instead, they adapted to become new forms of prejudice and oppression embedded in society, withstanding time.

The legacy of slavery continues to impact society today, manifesting in systematic disparities, cultural contributions, and the significance of recognizing Black success. Education is crucial to understanding the intersection of these historical and contemporary influences, to help pave the way for a more equitable future.

Today, many see institutions of oppression as origins of the past which continue to discriminate against individuals. For example, the healthcare disparities that once impacted Black Americans remain present. A study conducted by researcher Jonathan Metz reports that Black activists during the Civil Rights Movement were inaccurately labeled as schizophrenic due to their supposed 'pathologic desire for equality'.

The tendency to misdiagnose Black patients put them at a severe disadvantage when seeking effective medical care. These prejudices still exist today as a 2017 Rutgers University study revealed Black Americans are more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia than other race groups and oftentimes doctors place more emphasis on psychotic symptoms in these individuals.

Economic inequalities also stem from historical discrimination. Since the coerced and unpaid labor of slavery, economic opportunities for Black Americans have been restricted. As of 2022, the Survey of Consumer Finances data reports the median white household held $284,310 in wealth, more than six times that of the median Black house-

hold at $44,100. This discrepancy in generational wealth, reinforced by systemic barriers, underscores the lasting impact of slavery and racial injustice.

Racial and ethnic education helps offer a holistic view of history and its lasting effects. These courses explore not only the consequences of slavery, but also the Black contributions that have shaped society. Focusing only on slavery as a legacy of oppression perpetuates the narrative that its abolition was a government effort to eliminate division and discrimination. In reality, slavery was abolished largely due to the resilience and resistance of the Black community.

In AP African American Studies, we learn how enslaved people used spirituals, songs with biblical themes, to resist the dehumanizing conditions and injustice of enslavement, expressing creativity and communicating strategic information. "Steal Away to Jesus" by Wallace Willis, is a traditional African American spiritual with double meanings hidden in its lyrics and symbols. These spirituals preserved rhythms and performance styles from Africa, while also expressing their experiences in America. They served as an outlet for expression, while effectively balancing African heritage with American identity.

The class helps draw connections, highlighting how in the early twentieth century, the Harlem Renaissance and Jazz Age opened opportunities for Black musicians, record labels and vocalists to make an impact as well. Jazz music drew heavily from the Blues genre which has its roots in slavery and spirituals. It created a space for Black female singers like Bessie Smith and her song "Downhearted Blues," along with Josephine Baker, who gained international fame and became a symbol of the Jazz Age in Paris. Black American contributions to music in the 1900s became the foundation for Black influence in the music industry today, laying the framework for hip-hop and rap by breaking down racial barriers in music.

Courses like AP African American Studies and Ethnic Studies are essential to providing accurate historical context and a deeper understanding of contemporary issues. As a student taking both classes, I feel confident when saying that understanding systemic racism is crucial to recognizing how to address injustice and repair harm. The exclusion of this material can lead to a lack of understanding and deter progress. For example, the phrase "All Lives Matter" emerged in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, a campaign to address the racial insecurities Black Americans face. Without historical context, some may misinterpret Black Lives Matter as an exclusionary movement. In reality, it is a response to the systemic issues such as police brutality or other inequalities affecting the Black community.

Education helps clarify these distinctions, ensuring that when discussions about race and inequality happen, conversationalists employ accurate information and there is no room for misinterpretation. However, access to these courses is not universal. Public schools operate under state law, meaning that while California has mandated Ethnic Studies, states like Florida have banned AP African American Studies, restricting students' exposure to these critical topics. Looking forward, I encourage students to advocate for state-level policies that ensure these courses remain accessible for all. As we look around, we can see the lasting effects of slavery everywhere. These remnant impacts are an important reminder that these courses are crucial not just for understanding the past, but for the present and future as well.

Perfectionism

Continued from 38

themselves to others, striving to meet external standards that often feel impossible to attain.

In the context of relationships, this comparison can be especially harmful. As people measure their worth based on how they stack up against others, they may feel that their relationships need to conform to a certain ideal or standard - whether it is about appearances, behavior, or success.

These unrealistic comparisons can breed dissatisfaction, as individuals feel they are never "enough" or that their relationships do not measure up.

The pressure to meet expectations set by external factors like other relationships and personal views inhibits vulnerability. "It would be a lie to imply that there isn't an actual risk when we are vulnerable," as Licensed Therapist Lauren Feldman explains. When one makes themself vulnerable in a relationship, they crack the facade of perfection and open up the possibility of disappointing their partner. However, without this vulnerability and realness individuals can only form superficial connections.

To effectively address the pervasive issue of perfectionism, we need to foster a mindset that not only embraces authenticity but also sees mistakes as essential to growth. When pressure for flawless images and behaviors dominates society, encouraging online and offline vulnerability and openness can help shift the narrative from impossible ideals to meaningful, genuine connections. By promoting self-compassion and allowing space for imperfection, we can gradually dismantle the unrealistic standards that often fuel emotional burnout. When we start to view mistakes as opportunities for learning rather than sources of shame, we create a culture that celebrates real, raw experiences over polished facades, leading to deeper relationships and healthier mental well-being for all.

In a world that constantly pushes us toward perfection, embracing imperfection can be the key to truly meaningful connections. As we begin to value vulnerability over flawlessness, we open the door to deeper, more authentic relationships that nurture our mental health and well-being.

Lost in Translation

Translation systems must be more accessible to combat the use of language brokers

Tselmeg Orgilmunkh | Staff Writer

Graphic by Bo Chevaleau

I often hear the question, "What happened to you?" when adults realize my Mongolian accent has faded, my vocabulary has diminished, and I slip English words amid Mongolian sentences– it reminds me of how often I used to speak Mongolian to help my family when I was a child. It also serves as a reminder that after living in the U.S. and speaking English for most of my life, I can no longer effectively interpret like I used to.

Children who informally assist with communication by translating between languages are titled language brokers. According to a 2023 Nordic Social Work research, many children of immigrants in the U.S. may feel obligated to carry out this role during serious situations. This often harms language brokers' mental health and other aspects of daily life to live up to their linguistic expectations.

A 2017 Journal of Adolescence study reveals that over 90 percent of children of immigrants serve as translators for adults in numerous environments. The high percentage conveys the critical need for professional interpreters. This demand is only growing as the 2022 United States Census Bureau poll revealed the number of people who primarily speak languages other than English has tripled since the 1980s. Consequently, filling vacancies for translators should be a priority since youth are not equipped with interpretation training, education, or developmental maturity.

A 2023 article by Kansas City Universal Radio (KCUR) found that a crucial cause for the use of language brokers is that numerous organizations lack interpreter services due to a shortage of qualified translators. This compels some client families to informally employ their children during necessary processes, including health care visits, parent-teacher conferences, and bank transactions.

However, it is not only institutions that lack translation services. Government organizations fall short as well. The U.S. Department of State Translating Division offers translation in only nine of over 350 languages spoken in the U.S. The few languages in which interpretation is frequently available are Spanish, Mandarin, and French. With this lack of diversity forces, other language speakers are left with limited efficient and financially feasible options other than falling back on their children, contributing to the widespread use of language brokers.

Most establishments are not required to offer translation services. Furthermore, although the Affordable Care Act mandates translators in healthcare institutions, language brokering has become so normalized that kids still often translate instead.

However, children cannot be held to the expectation of interpretation since they have not received specialized interpretation training. A 2022 Monterey Bay University research paper and KCUR both found that translating during high-stress situations with advanced vocabulary manifests decreased academic performance because of time spent interpreting instead of homework and mental exhaustion from balancing multiple languages. It also causes strained familial relationships for a child to take on a powerful adult-like role. Emotionally, tasks above their developmental level can cause discomfort, anxiety, anger, and embarrassment from increased pressure to translate and a fear of mistakes. Youth should not have to compromise their mental health or education to help their family, and the government should utilize resources to support all Americans, not just English speakers.

Additionally, language brokers should not be asked to translate in professional settings due to their personal affiliation with the family members they are translating for. A 2023 Groundtruth Project report noticed that family members often miscommunicate news of serious diagnoses to protect and soften patients' emotions. Most likely, doctors will not realize a language broker's attempt to protect their family's feelings because of the language barrier. Professionals should deal with heavy topics because they do not have a personal relationship with the patient, unlike the children who will experience the heartbreak and aftermath at home.

Continued on 43

Strike First, Strike Hard

Taking action in our own lives

Gwyneth Lee | Staff Writer

Graphic by Sela Sarbiewski

As a wrestler, one major concept that I have been trying to internalize is that I have to be aggressive; I need to take the first shot or my opponent will. Still, I always hesitate. Sometimes I find myself waiting for a moment that seems perfect. Other times I fear that I will not succeed if I attack. But if I resist making an effort to be aggressive, I give my opponent the advantage.

This idea of being aggressive, of acting instead of waiting, can and should be applied to all aspects of our lives. We should not wait to be motivated, we should be disciplined. We should work even when we do not want to.

We often delay action, especially when we fear the unknown. A 2021 CBS News poll revealed that 59 percent of people under the age of 50 would prefer traveling to the future over the past. Although there is not one particular reason for this, oftentimes it is because they are scared about changing something in the past, and of course, I agree with this. Like so many others, I am scared that if I change a single, seemingly insignificant thing, I might change the course of my life. However, these decisions shape our future just as well. The small moments of our lives, the little decisions we make, are the things that shape our future, and not just those major moments that we deem 'life-changing.' The little decisions we make today, those decisions to finally take action, shape who we will become.

Furthermore, the momentum of doing even just the tiniest action can lead to something great. In his book *Atomic Habits*, James Clear reasons that small habits will make a big difference in one's daily life. Pushing oneself to do one percent better every day is wildly underestimated; one percent better every day for a year results in being 37 percent better at the end of the year. Adding a minute of reading a day results in reading over eight hours in a month, or enough to finish a 400-page book.

Change is rarely ever immediate, but rather the result of our actions over the course of time. This can deter people from taking action as the idea that the initiatives they take may not produce immediate results can be demotivating. One way to combat this mindset is proactive thinking.

According to *Psychology Today*, proactivity is about thinking ahead and changing the direction of one's future, tailoring it to the outcome one desires. It is distinctive from ordinary behavior because most of what we do is passive, whether it be our habits, routines, or biases that keep us on a familiar path. Proactive thinking stops us from living by simply going through the motions.

Furthermore, proactive thinking is the mindset that drives constructive change. A recent article from the International Honor Society in Psychology attests that colleges usually emphasize academic excellence, exploring interests, and decision-making as factors of success. However, students rarely realize that to thrive under these standards, they must steer and drive their own success. Although some people tend to behave more proactively than others, no mindset is fixed. Cultivating a proactive mindset can take time, and is often a process of trial and error. Ultimately, adapting and taking action will not only foster growth, but will also feed grit and discipline.

As important as proactive thinking is, it is just as important to follow through. Proactive thinking will allow someone to visualize the end goal, but even as we recognize the importance of action we often fail to take it. In school, this may be as simple as wanting to improve one's grades, but being afraid to ask for help. Being able to take action and go through with initial ideas is imperative for progressing as a person.

Another *Psychology Today* article

claims that those who have the desire to take initiative in uncomfortable situations are more likely to be leaders and those who follow through with plans have better emotional reliability. An open door means nothing if no action is taken. Proactive thinking is a mindset that can be strengthened, and proactive action is a personal choice that no external factors can dictate.

Discomfort, however, is not the sole reason for failing to follow through or take action. A more common reason is procrastination. According to Insights Psychology, there are four main reasons for procrastination. The first is a false sense of time. Students, for example, often overestimate how much time they will have to complete a task in the future and end up completing tasks last minute.

In other cases, individuals wait for the right mood or motivation. This surge in motivation rarely comes unless in the form of a delayed caffeine rush during the late hours of the night.

The third form is cognitive distortions: the skewed conception of time and task completion. This directly relates to the first two reasons, as it lets us believe tasks will not take as long as they actually do and we will be more equipped to tackle them in the future.

The final reason is present bias. We prioritize immediate reward over the long-term one. We tell ourselves, yes, it is in my best interest to put more effort into this essay and get a good grade, but right now I would rather doom scroll on social media. We forget the satisfaction of finishing a project and the pride of seeing the result of our hard work because the future benefits seem distant and less impactful than what is happening in the moment.

These thought processes work in conjunction and cause us to put off tasks, ultimately leading to increased stress and anxiety, lower academic performance, diminished well-being, worsened mental and physical health, and general suffering. Learning to fight the urge to procrastinate and take action is critical to success. Continuing to procrastinate will ultimately lead to failure.

Clear's *Atomic Habits* further attests that the inability to take action can be severely detrimental. While doing one percent better will lead to exponential growth, doing one percent worse will lead to an exponential decline. Doing one percent worse every day, over the course of a year, will lead to a decline that reaches nearly zero.

Many students are always waiting, whether it be for the right time or the motivation, yet time is so imperative and so limited. In a year, we may end up looking back on our current selves and wonder why we did not accomplish all that we wanted while simultaneously continuing to push our goals to the next year.

I can look back at the most recent video of me wrestling and point out moments where I waited. However, even though I hesitate to take shots when I wrestle, my match is never over until it is over. It is okay if I waited instead of taking a shot as I found a chance to take another.

That being said, I can not rely on that overwhelming surge of adrenaline to push me to take a shot. I need to take it as soon as I can, despite uncertainties. The same applies to aspiration. We have to make the first move in our goals and ambitions. We have to take action before we look back with regret because neither opportunities nor success will wait for us.

Language Brokers

Continued from 41

Another aspect of brokering that negatively impacts children is that language brokers often go beyond translating words. They interpret body language and behavioral customs because these methods of communication can differ from their native country. It is an expectation to help guide their family in a new country which professional translators are not asked to do because there is no sense of familial obligation.

An article University of California, Merced published in 2024 found that emotional brokering is an unexpected, spur-of-the-moment task. With emotional brokering, professors recognize various negative impacts like frustration and embarrassment. Interpreting emotions and explaining motivations for others' actions is a complex task–one that youth should not be burdened with.

Amidst these difficulties and expectations, there is an underlying pressure put on language brokers to maintain fluency in their native tongue so they can continue to assist their families. This adds another layer of burden, which 2025 LiveScience research supports, reporting that a typical circumstance when one forgets their native language occurs when young children move to another country where a different language is spoken. This is the life situation most language brokers find themselves in, and without accessible interpreters, they must fight against these odds to help their families simply function.

To improve the translation system, organizations should have dedicated translators to provide quick, accessible interpretation services. The U.S. Translating Division must ensure documents sent via mail are easily found online for readers to copy and paste into a reliable translating tool. In situations like airplane safety instructions, rather than saying it in English and two other languages, a visual tutorial ensures a broader audience will understand.

I remember at age nine stumbling with my words in a doctor's office trying to figure out what they were saying in English, and afterwards translating it into Mongolian while fighting the feeling of unease. I felt like this was my role. This is what I was made to do, yet I felt lost trying to find the words while adults expectantly stared at me in silence. Too many children understand the desperation and embarrassment of grabbing at forgotten words after living in the U.S. for a long time, and yet it goes unnoticed by the systems and organizations that enable it. If young children are not trusted to have jobs, or even run with scissors, it should not be normalized for them to take over a fundamental job category. As a society, attention must be directed to finding qualified, skilled interpreters, whether human or technology, and implementing them into institutions.

Shooting for Success: Women's Soccer and Basketball

Reviewing the challenges and accomplishments of women's sports during the 2024-2025 winter season

Maddie Obertello, Natalie Pecci, and Samantha Swift | Staff Writers

Photo by Audrey Martin

Students and their parents cram into the gym on a Saturday night, crowding the bleachers and leaving no room for sitting. All of them are there for one thing: to support women's sports.

Many of the Acalanes women's sports teams advanced far into the playoffs this year and achieved historic milestones for the school.

Despite recent success, women's sports at Acalanes face a difficult challenge. Whether it is basketball, soccer, or any other sport, turnout and enthusiasm at female games have repeatedly been subpar compared to men's sports.

"I think as a school, we need to come to a girls' game with the same energy we do for boys. For example, it is discouraging when we stand at the boys' basketball game, but at the girls' everyone sits, and it also feels like we do less cheers [or] chants," Female Athletic Board (FAB) co-president and senior Addie McShane said.

FAB was created at Acalanes to better support female athletes. The club works to ensure equal treatment of male and female sports.

"Our whole mission is to make sure that schools across the district have equality with our female and male sports and that all of our female athletes feel as though they're being treated equitably ... [We are] making sure that we're promoting female sports and just making sure that [men's sports are not] the only thing that's important here," FAB co-president and senior Addy Treter said.

One of the main issues women's sports face is underrepresentation. Many people do not support women's sports simply because they are not advertised as well.

"The biggest problem is simply that people aren't thinking about women's sports. So, we've put a lot of effort into making sure that all of our female sports are being represented the same amount as boys' sports," Treter said. "We're not trying to say that you shouldn't go support boy's football or tennis or whatever it is. We're just saying that there's female counterparts to all of these sports, and they deserve to be seen just the same as the boys do."

This year, support for women's sports has been on the rise. The women's basketball team, in particular, has noticed that the amount of support they have received this year has been immense compared to past years.

"I think getting the word out through leadership and the announcements has been really helpful. I [also] think that the girls that are on the team are really likable people on campus so I think that's really helped," women's basketball Assistant Coach Alexis Tamony said.

On the other hand, several members of the women's soccer team have commented that they do not get the attention or recognition that they deserve.

"The game where I saw the most support from students was either my freshman year when we played Campolindo at home, or this year when we played at Carondelet. And even though we received the most support at those games, it was still a small number compared to the support that other sports receive," women's soccer captain and senior Demi Woods said.

FAB also expressed that many female sports only gain interest and excitement when the team is doing well or playing school rivals.

"I think there's a culture here where if you're not winning, it's not important. You can see that through our [Campolindo] games like girl's soccer, lacrosse, [and] even volleyball. Everybody's going to the [Campolindo] game, and then that's it because they just want to see you win. I think that it's important to acknowledge that it's okay to lose in sports; it happens sometimes, boys or girls. And that if you're a female playing in a women's sport and you lose, it doesn't mean that you're any less and that you don't have less skill. We still need to be equally represented," Treter said.

FAB observed that a big part of reforming school attitude and culture is to get involved in the various events and sports at school. They encourage all students to attend games, regardless of the sport.

"Get involved, like you can play sports and you can go to games regardless of what it is. Do it because you'll have a bet-

ter time in your entire high school career, even if it's something you don't understand at all. I don't understand softball at all, but I go to the games, and they're super fun you might as well," Treter said.

Soccer:

Women's soccer generally can be one of the less-viewed sports. This year, however, their victories in important games brought them more viewership.

The women's soccer team had a historic 2024 season. Their achievements in the regular season led them to play in the Division One (DI) bracket, making school history.

"It was surreal, considering we are a [Division Three] school, but it was very exciting to know that we were the first women's soccer team in Acalanes history to make it this far," Woods said.

The team squared off against the number one ranked team, Carondelet, in the quarterfinals after beating the number eight ranked team, Las Lomas, in a shootout.

"Going into the game, we knew that if we gave it our all we could beat them, and that's what we did. Everyone on the team, from the bench, the coaching, and the people playing, put everything into the game. They were a good team, but we played with the most effort and tenacity we had all season," captain and senior Lucca DeBiasse said.

Despite being the underdogs, the Dons battled through, outscoring the Cougars 3-2. This win led them to the semifinals, where they fell to the fourth-ranked Amador Valley. Nonetheless, they made school history by playing in the DI bracket and making it all the way to the semifinals.

"We played for each other and [finished] the season being able to bond and play together since we were close and had fun at every practice and game," DeBiasse said.

Some attribute this success to their new coach, Alex Avelar, and the strong team connections among returning players.

"This year, we had a lot of seniors that have played together for a while. We also got a new coach this year for varsity. He has played a big role in leading the team by just connecting with all the players and pushing us in practice," DeBiasse said.

A large part of the team's success was their belief in themselves and their capabilities to do well this season.

"Our mindset for the whole season was 'some want it more than others.' We felt we wanted it more and worked hard for it, and once we got to the playoffs we switched to 'why not us?' No one expected us to do this well, so we felt we had nothing to lose," Head Coach Alex Avelar said.

Basketball:

In the late 1990s, the women's basketball program won a state championship in Division Three, when division was solely based on size of schools. This year, the team was in the Open Division for both the North Coast Section (NCS) and state tournaments. In this top division, the best schools from each section are placed into a twelve team tournament bracket.

This season, the team was led by a tight-knit group of five seniors who have played together since middle school. This familiarity and cohesiveness contributed greatly to their success.

"We've all gotten super close just because we spend so much time together and we've all had basically the same mindset throughout all of our seasons. We go into every game with a relentless game plan, and we try our hardest to play every game as if it were a championship," senior Dulci Vail said.

This year, the women's basketball team made it all the way to the NCS Open Division championship game, where they fell short to San Ramon Valley. Despite this, they advanced to the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) tournament.

"Unfortunately, we came up short in the [NCS] championship game, but this was the first time we've made it into the championship game in the Open Division. It's a really great honor," Tamony said.

This year women's basketball made it further into the playoffs in the Open Division than any year previous, and with that came immense pressure to succeed.

"I perform well under pressure because I trust myself and my teammates and I'm confident in our abilities. Making it that far compared to previous years was really cool because you could see our hard work and dedication finally pay off even if we came up short," Ari Hallstrom said.

A key aspect of their success was in their training and preparation. The team had several members of the junior varsity (JV) men's basketball team scrimmage and practice with them as they approached the playoffs.

"We would bring boys from [the] JV team to scrimmage us consistently which helped us push our pace a lot. We also honed our plays, added new plays, and worked on our conditioning," Hallstrom said.

Moving forward, the team aims to continue their success and progress through strong leadership. The juniors hope to follow in the footsteps of the seniors and follow the positive example they have created.

"After the legacy the seniors made it's definitely going to be hard to fill the holes they left this past year but I and the other juniors are going to try our best to carry our team far," captain and junior Lexi Le said.

As the seniors graduate and the team enters a new era, they will reflect positively on all they have accomplished this season, and look forward to future success.

"It's been a joy coaching this group this year. They're a really neat group of young adults that I can't wait to see what they do with their futures," Tamony said.

Courtesy Photo/Eric Morford

Getting Ready for Game Time

Exploring how athletes prepare for their games

Hanna Wiśniewska, Donovan McGrath, Sela Sarbiewski, and Sydney Scovic | Social Media Managers and Staff Writers

Graphics by Isaac Topp

From Michael Jordan's lucky shorts to Wade Boggs' pregame meals, many athletes believe in certain superstitions or routines that help them perform their best. For athletes at Acalanes, these routines range from personal habits to whole team rituals that are unique to each sport and athlete.

Pregame rituals are consistent actions that an athlete performs prior to each game. Having a routine is essential as it helps prepare the mind, body, or both for the upcoming competition. Acalanes athletes have developed pregame rituals during the 2024-2025 seasons.

For men's basketball and volleyball player and junior Preston Hilsabeck, it is crucial to be comfortable and pain-free during game time, leading to a pregame meal of painkillers and water.

"Before games, I just have some Advil and water, I really prioritize getting my body right before the game so I'm not in pain while playing," Hilsabeck said.

Hilsabeck carries his pregame traditions over to different sports in order to create a sense of comfort and tempo before playing.

"I pretty much have the same routine for both basketball and volleyball, it creates a sense of rhythm for me. I just make sure my body feels good before I play rather than getting warmed up by only focusing on ball skills or stuff like that," Hilsabeck said.

Swimmer and senior Elyse Budke focuses on her routine before arriving at meets to maximize her performance.

"Before I get to the pool I like to get a good meal in. I listen to music, and I stretch sometimes," Budke said.

Senior Brady Quinn, a men's basketball and baseball player, opts for a banana before games to help with cramping, which has proved beneficial throughout his high school career.

"I definitely always try to have a banana pregame for both sports, because it helps with cramping. I started doing that because I saw a video of Major League Baseball (MLB) player [Munenori Kawasaki] saying it helps you to not cramp. I thought it was clever, and I've been doing it ever since and haven't missed a game yet," Quinn said.

In addition to preparing his body by eating certain foods, Quinn also likes to take naps before games to unwind and conserve energy. These naps help to break up the school day and game time.

"Before basketball games, naps just kinda help me get relaxed, help me save some energy up for later that night especially if I was feeling a little tired throughout the day. It's like a little reset button between school and basketball, which I think is really important on a game day," Quinn said.

Another part of Quinn's pregame routine is getting focused before the game begins. Prior to baseball games, getting a feel for the field helps him lock in.

"Once I'm at the field for baseball, I like to get my uniform on before I put my cleats on and walk around a little bit, just kind of around the field to help me get centered," Quinn said.

Women's volleyball player and senior Annie Baker follows a specific routine before games, occasionally altering it according to previous successes.

"Before a game, I drink a [Yerba Mate], have a sandwich from Diablo Foods, and I listen to the same music every game day. If I play especially well in one game I will listen to the exact same songs before the next game," Baker said.

Others on the volleyball team like junior Sophia Terry prefer to spend time with family before big games.

"It's been a tradition for years for my mom to do my hair before I play so I always find time to do that with her," Terry said.

On top of rest and hydration, the women's volleyball team makes a point to be mentally prepared before their games.

"My coach is big on mental strength, so we all make sure to set physical and mental goals for each game or tournament," Terry said.

As game time nears, the team listens to their go-to pregame song to create energy. They also dedicate time to checking in with one another about their day.

"As a team, we have a pregame song that we do to get everyone excited to play. We also go around and share our highs and lows of the day," Baker said.

Women's basketball player and senior Natalie Frechman prefers to spend time with her teammates before games.

"[Before a game] I like to eat dinner with one of my teammates at my house and play certain songs on the way to the game," Frechman said.

Besides the oranges and Gatorade Frechman's coaches provide before every game, she always makes sure to eat a balanced meal.

"I prefer sandwiches or pasta because they have a good amount of calories, but aren't too heavy," Frechman said.

Women's lacrosse captain and senior Campbell Evans also has a few different ways to get her teammates ready for game day. Similar to Baker, before games Evans goes to Diablo Foods to get a sandwich with her teammates, and then they head to the locker room. Spending time together helps get them into the right headspace before they take to the field.

"Once we get [to the locker room] we all do each other's hair, hype everyone up, and then go out to the field to warm up," Evans said.

Rethinking the Rules

How the inclusion of transgender women disrupts female athletics

Anonymous Contributor | Editorial

Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, the writer chose to remain anonymous. Their views do not reflect those of the entire* Blueprint *staff.

After years of training, discipline, and sacrifice, I believed I earned a fair shot at victory. But when I stepped onto the competition floor, I realized that no amount of effort could overcome the built-in disadvantage I was facing. It was as if I had already lost.

A few weeks ago, I competed in an open, non-National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sanctioned sports event. The competition welcomed athletes of all ages and abilities, and I expected a fair contest. However, one of my competitors was a transgender woman – taller, stronger, and visibly more powerful than the rest of those on the field. She won the competition with ease, even while demonstrating less refined technique than those who placed after her.

This athlete did nothing wrong. She followed all the rules, treated others with respect, and competed within the guidelines set by the officials. Despite this, the reality remained. Her physical advantages, developed years prior to transitioning, gave her an edge that was impossible for the rest of us to match. I felt like all the hours I had put into training were being overshadowed by something I could never change.

I hesitate to write this. I do not wish to target or alienate transgender individuals, who already face significant challenges. I sympathize with their struggles and firmly believe in their right to participate in sports. But as I stood amongst the competition, it was impossible for me to ignore how she physically stood out. A sense of unfairness lingered, one I could not dismiss.

My experience at this competition reaffirmed that fairness in women's athletics is a conversation that cannot be ignored, especially as policies surrounding transgender athletes continue to evolve.

On Feb. 5, President Trump signed Executive Order (EO) 14201, titled "Keeping Men out of Women's Sports." EO 14201 states that, "... it is the policy of the United States to rescind all funds from educational programs that deprive women and girls of fair athletic opportunities, which results in the endangerment, humiliation, and silencing of women and girls and deprives them of privacy. It shall also be the policy of the United States to oppose male competitive participation in women's sports more broadly, as a matter of safety, fairness, dignity, and truth."

In response, the NCAA issued new rules on Feb. 6, barring transgender women from competing in female categories. While transgender women are still permitted to practice with the women's teams, they may not compete in NCAA-sanctioned events in the women's category if they were assigned male at birth or have undergone hormone therapy.

A key legal argument behind this order is Title IX, which guarantees equal opportunities for women in federally funded institutions. However, interpretations of Title IX differ. The California Interscholastic Federation (CIF), for example, argues that Title IX protects transgender athletes, citing the 2020 Supreme Court case Bostock v. Clayton County. This case ruled that discrimination based on gender identity is prohibited under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. The CIF contends that this reasoning extends to Title IX, allowing transgender women to compete in female sports at the high school level.

However, Title IX explicitly states that people should not be discriminated against "on the basis of sex." The specific use of "sex" rather than "gender" aligns with EO 14168, which defines sex as an individual's biological classification at birth.

As a dedicated female athlete, I recognize the biological differences between men and women. These differences are particularly evident in sports such as swimming, track and field, and weightlifting, where male athletes, on average, achieve faster times and lift heavier weights than their female counterparts at similar, or less training levels. While there are exceptional female athletes who outperform some men, the argument for transgender women in female sports often relies on these outliers rather than the broader reality of athletic performance disparities.

For instance, the CIF's Gender Diverse Youth Sport Inclusivity Toolbook references the case Soule v. Connecticut Association of Schools, in which female high school track athletes argued that competing against transgender women cost them championships and scholarships. The Toolbook attempts to refute these claims by highlighting that one of the female athletes later won a championship against a transgender competitor. This response sidesteps the broader issue. Women should not have to step up to an unfair challenge simply because policy fails to account for inherent biological differences. Athletes are meant to be separated into fair competition, not forced to defy natural differences in anatomy to prove a point.

I do not speak out on this issue because I am upset about losing. I have worked tirelessly to achieve my athletic goals, and I refuse to let an uneven playing field undermine that effort. Competition is not solely about winning, rather it is about fairness, integrity, and respect for the work every athlete puts in. When an individual enters a competition with a significant biological advantage, it disrupts the fundamental balance that makes sports meaningful.

At the same time, I deeply value the role sports play in building community, discipline, and resilience. I do not believe an equitable solution has been found yet. Transgender individuals deserve the opportunity to compete. Nonetheless, the inclusion of transgender women in women's sports presents undeniable challenges for fairness.

Given these complexities, I believe transgender athletes should be welcomed in recreational sports, where competition is second to participation and community. However, until a fair and inclusive solution is developed, transgender women should not be permitted to compete in competitive high school, college, or professional women's sports. This is not about exclusion, it is about preserving the integrity of female athletics while recognizing the real challenges posed by biological differences. The conversation must continue, but it must do so with fairness as its guiding principle.

SPORTS BEATS

Baseball

Will Miller | Staff Writer

Courtesy Photo/Tommy Terhar
Tommy Terhar looks for the sign.

The Acalanes baseball team (5-1-1 overall, 0-0 league) is looking to build off of last year's success and challenge for the Division One North Coast Section (NCS) title. They started the season away on Feb. 25 at Pinole Valley where junior Branson Smith led the team to a 3-2 victory by pitching all eight innings.

On Feb. 28 the Dons traveled to Piedmont and lost in a thriller 7-5. Reeling from two games without a win the Dons went up to Marin Caliotic on March 8 and rallied for a four-run seventh inning, beating them 8-7. Since that game, the Dons have rattled off two straight wins, including their home opener against Bishop O'Dowd 3-0 on March 15.

Despite losing their head coach there are no changes to the team's mentality as the new coaching staff believes in the players.

"We want to win an NCS championship and we want to win our league. These are things that the team decided upon going into this year and we work toward them every day," Head Coach Andrew Merken said.

Beach Volleyball

Noah Frankel | Staff Writer

Blueprint Photo/Noah Frankel
The team poses for a picture.

With the weather getting warmer daily, the women's beach volleyball team (2-2 overall) is gearing up for their season.

The team lost its first game of the season against Northgate on Feb. 26. However, they bounced back, beating Northgate the next day. Then they lost another game against Campolindo on March 13.

On March 19, the team beat Clayton Valley at home.

Although the team had faced some losses, they are ready to return stronger with guidance from their head coach, Nicole Cuhnle. Leading a group of athletes who are determined to win, Kuhnle plans to help the team progress.

"I want my girls to be able to learn, to grow, to be challenged in a safe way, a healthy way. I want them to build their character and their volleyball skills. I want them to build their strength and their endurance," Kuhnle said.

Men's Golf

Trevor Krick | Staff Writer

Contributing Photo/Owen Hulst
Naveen Ahuja hits the ball.

With the spring sports season now in full swing, the men's golf team (5-1 overall, 2-0 league) has high hopes for this year's season and are looking to get off to a hot start.

The Dons started off their season on Feb. 27, just barely losing to Athenian 192-190 at Rossmoor Golf Course. The team bounced back quickly on March 3, playing at home at the Contra Costa Country Club and defeating Albany 194-231.

The Dons picked up another win on March 3, crushing Bentley 150-199 at Rossmoor. Continuing their hot streak, they got a third straight win, defeating Miramonte 201-209 at Contra Costa. On March 13, the Dons then traveled to the home course of Northgate, Boundary Oaks Golf Course, and triumphed 201-209. On March 19, the Dons defeated Las Lomas at home 197-238.

After losing many players last year due to seniors graduating, Head Coaches Steve Nelsen and Randy Jones aim to stay in contention by developing young players new to the program.

"We are just trying to build the program for the future ... If we can continue to build our skill set while growing the program and contending each week, we will have accomplished a lot this season," Nelsen said.

Men's Lacrosse

Trevor Krick | Staff Writer

Courtesy Photo/Joshua Sinha
The team celebrates after a goal.

The men's lacrosse team, (6-2 overall, 0-0 league), started the season strong looking to make a statement before league begins.

The team began their season in style, defeating Dublin 14-3 on Feb. 25 and followed it up with a big win over Stuart Hall 16-2 on Feb. 28. Continuing their winning streak, the Dons defeated Sacred Heart Cathedral Preparatory 8-3 on March 5 and handled Bishop O'Dowd 10-6 on March 7.

After struggling the previous season with a very young roster, the Dons have some experience under their belts and have taken this season on in full force with key contributors stepping up. The team's tight-knit bond makes them special. With several returners on the team and frequent team bonding, team morale is always high.

"We always have team bondings for lacrosse. After each game, we always hang out with each other with team bondings. That's something that makes the team so fun. When you're friends with everyone on the team it's a lot more enjoyable," junior Jan Korzeniowski said.

Men's Tennis

Max Trexler | Staff Writer

Courtesy Photo/Nick Owens
Nick Owens prepares for the opposing serve.

The men's tennis team (7-5 overall, 2-3 league) is off to a fast start as they serve up another spring season.

The Dons defeated De La Salle 9-0 on Feb. 24 and Piedmont 8-1 on Feb 25. They followed up those two victories with another two games at home as they defeated Head Royce 6-3 on Feb. 27 and Branson 6-3 on March 3. They then traveled to Heritage High School on March 4 and defeated the Patriots 6-3.

The season is still early with the league right around the corner. The team continues to build a foundation to carry them through the season.

"So I think we're about as prepared as we can be to take on [Campolindo] and Miramonte ... It's up to the boys now. They've got to take the ball and run with it," Head Coach Rick O'Brien said.

Men's Volleyball

Sameed Marco | Staff Writer

Contributing Photo/Gabriel Villsenor
Arthur Tam spikes the ball.

After a slow start to their season the men's volleyball team (4-9 overall, 0-3 league) look to improve their record and grow as a team.

The Dons lost 3-0 to Moreau Catholic on Feb. 25 and 3-0 to Amador Valley on Feb. 26. On March 5 and 6 they beat Freedom 3-2 and Monte Vista 3-0 respectively. Then, on March 11 they lost 3-0 to Northgate in their first league game. The team lost a close match to Pittsburgh on March 13 finishing with a score of 3-2. On March 20 they lost to Las Lomas 3-0.

The team looks towards the community for energy at home games as the season progresses.

"We would love to pack the gym with raving fans. Every home game will have door prizes and spirit kits. Come one, come all, and be the seventh Don on the court," Head Coach Steve Long said.

Softball

Saaj Shah | Online Editor

Courtesy Photo/RJ Natal
Esa Orman steps up to bat against Campolindo.

The softball team (6-1 overall, 0-0 league) has started off strong and is ready to push for a successful season.

On Feb. 20, the season opened up with a tough fight against Dougherty Valley, in which the team fell short 14-9.

On Feb. 27, the Dons began their series of consecutive wins starting with a decisive win over Albany with a final score of 12-2. A week later, on March 4, the Dons faced Las Lomas winning 13-2. Continuing their winning streak, the Dons won 10-7 against Pinole Valley on March 10, and obliterated Kennedy 6-1 on March 18.

Softball has been taking time outside of school to bond and learn about each other.

"During the season, we have pasta feeds and barbecues. Last Saturday, we had a field clean-up day with a team barbecue," senior Emme Young said.

The team will face new challenges this year, but they are prepared and excited to face these obstacles.

"This year, we have moved up a division in the league. We are looking forward to playing new teams and improving as a team," junior Maya Shoenhair said.

Stunt Cheer

Natalie Pecci | Staff Writer

Courtesy Photo/ Natalie Pecci
The stunt team practices their rountine.

The stunt cheer team (0-3 overall) is flipping and tossing its way into their new season.

For their first competition of the season on March 13, the team came up short to Las Lomas 11-8 after a hard-fought comeback attempt that prompted overtime. The team faced another tough loss against College Park the next day.

On March 19, the team hosted its first home game and its annual senior night. They faced off against Miramonte where they fell to the Matadors 7-4.

The team will face off against school rival Campolindo on March 26 for the first time.

"I am looking forward to going against [Campolindo] since they are our rival school, and it is their first year doing stunt," senior Erica Gombodorj said.

The team expects to continue to improve and work on their skills, through longer practices and better organization.

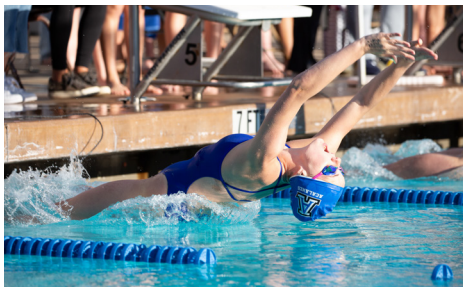
"[The] team's goals for this season is to reach higher levels of routines than we have in the past, which we have already made so much progress on," Gombodorj said.

The team anticipates building on last season and continuing to grow and get better every year.

"Our toughest competition will always be ourselves. Our goal every season is to improve upon our skills from the previous year until we reach the top," Head Coach Faith McLeod said.

Swimming

Tatum McElhattan | Print Arts Editor



Courtesy Photo/Bill Gerhardt
Maelin Stone starts her backstroke race.

Making a splash early in the season, the Acalanes swim team has faced tough competition.

In their first meet against College Park on March 5 they dominated almost every event they participated in. On March 11, the Dons had a split of wins and losses at another meet against Northgate, and rounded off their first few meets with many successes at the De La Salle Invitational on March 14.

They continued the season with a second invitational meet at Mission Viejo from March 14 to 16. The team traveled to southern California and faced tough competition coming in fifth place overall with many Acalanes athletes making their way to the finals.

The Dons battled against Miramonte on March 21, then competed against Benicia on March 26.

The team has built a positive environment throughout the season.

"The best part of being on the swim team is the culture. I always have so much fun with my teammates and coaches and it keeps the team's energy high. Because of this I am super excited for how this season will go," junior Estelle Block said.

Track and Field

Maya Stafford | Print Arts Editor

Blueprint Photo/Maya Stafford
Jackson Boselli competes in the long jump.

After a quick sprint back into the season, the track and field team has been successful with many standout athletes.

On Feb. 22, Acalanes hosted the Don of the Season meet in which senior *Haley Chelemedos set a new javelin school record with a throw of 86 '5", junior Deonte Littlejohn won the discus throw with a throw of 148 feet, and the boys 4x400 team placed fourth with a new personal record (PR) of 3:39.46.

On March 6, the Dons won their dual meet against California High School. The team hosted the Bob Warren Invitational Meet on March 8 resulting in numerous PR's across the entire team. Into the next week, the Dons had a dual meet against Las Lomas and won on March 13.

Overall, the Dons are off to a great start and have a good outlook for the rest of the season.

"We are all really pumped for the rest of the season and I think that will just carry over to our determination in our league meets and the postseason," senior Dulci Vail said.

Women's Lacrosse

Cara Hamilton | Staff Writer

Blueprint Photo/Audrey Martin
Reese Imrie fights a defender for the ball.

The women's lacrosse team (3-5 overall, 1-1 league) has had a rough kick-off to their season, but show promise for future games.

The team fell short in their first few matches with a 22-5 loss to Amador Valley on Feb. 26, a 17-8 loss to San Marin on Feb. 28, and two other losses to Monte Vista on Mar. 4, and Carondelet on Mar. 7.

Despite these initial losses,The Dons made a comeback against University High School on March 11, winning 14-8. The team went on to crush Northgate 18-8 on March 14, and Bishop O'Dowd 20-7 on March 18. On March 21, the team faced off against Miramonte, losing 16-12.

Despite a rocky start, the team still has hope for a bright season. After losing 11 seniors last year, the Dons have been working hard to reestablish connection throughout the program.

"As everyone gets used to playing with each other and getting to know each other's strengths and weaknesses, we will be able to win more and play more cohesively," captain and senior Claire Zimmerman said.

Blueprint would like to acknowledge that *Haley Chelemedos is a member of Blueprint staff.

regan scovic real estate

LAFAYETTE ORTHODONTICS
SETH R. OSTERMAN DDS, MS
895 Moraga Rd, Suite 3
Lafayette, CA 94549
: 925.283.1921
: 925.283.7794
: www.lafayettebraces.com

Courtesy Photo/Sarah Cusumano
Goddard waits for a pitch in a game against Vintage.

Keegan Goddard

Sophie Chinn | Online Editor-In-Chief

As the baseball team (4-1-1 overall, 0-0 league) ramps up for their exciting season ahead, senior Keegan Goddard has been a standout athlete for the Dons.

The center fielder has been on the team for three years and contributes to all aspects of the game, most notably his impressive fielding and base running.

"Keegan is one of the best all-around baseball players I have ever seen in high school ... I could choose any one of those five tools, hitting for contact, hitting for power, running, fielding, [or] throwing as his best skill or talent," Head Coach Andrew Merken said.

His teammates also recognize both his baseball skills and leadership qualities.

"He leads by example ... He sets the tone on the field and then everyone else can respond to that and so I think that's one of his best qualities as a leader," junior Isaac Copen said.

As the Dons look to build on last season's successes, Goddard will be key to keeping the entire team energized and focused on their postseason goals.

"He motivates the team by working hard and setting a good example for the younger players ... He has improved in all areas because he's so coachable and because of his great understanding of the game," Merken said.

Campbell Evans

James Hanzel | Staff Writer

As the women's lacrosse team (3-5 overall, 1-0 league) looks to make a run for the league title this year, senior attacker Campbell Evans is one of the key pieces to a successful season.

Her skills on the field have made her a valuable asset to the team.

"Campbell has been an integral part of the varsity attack for two years now. She's surprisingly sneaky and able to get away from even the best defender for a free shot. She doesn't panic under pressure and is equally good at passing when she sees an open teammate and shooting when she has an open shot," Head Coach Mark Rurka said.

Evans was selected as captain this year, and her teammates recognize the impact she makes by motivating them and fostering chemistry within the team.

"She motivates her teammates by being super positive all the time and hyping everyone up ... She organizes lacrosse bondings and helps everyone feel comfortable on the team," senior Taylor Mikalis said.

Evans' relentless work ethic has earned her a starting spot, and her dedication has shown in her improved abilities.

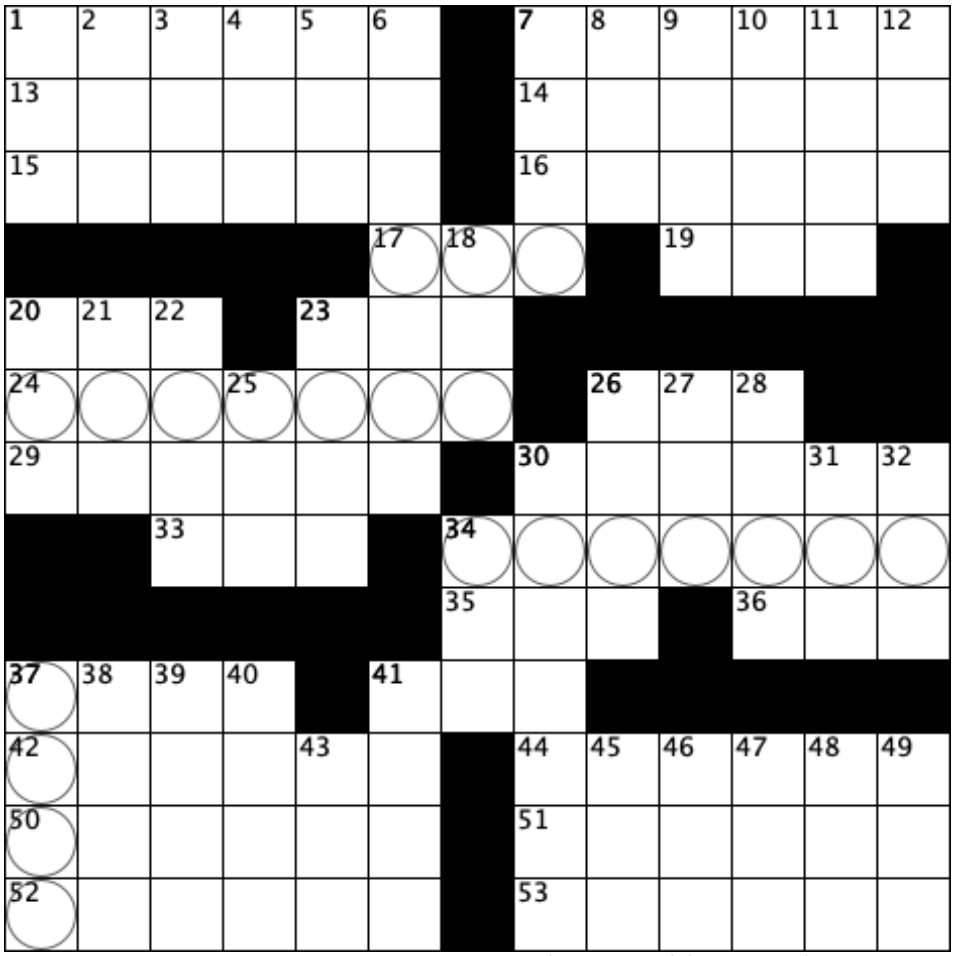
"Campbell has obviously worked hard to get where she is on the varsity squad ... She's more confident on the field in practices and games and her stick skills have improved dramatically," Rurka said.

Blueprint Photo/Audrey Martin
Evans prepares for the next play.

Crossword

Created by Sameed Marco, Neve Murphy, and Nico Roig | Head Crucerverbalists

To celebrate the turn of the season, there are spring words hidden!



Across:

1. Stood idly
7. Slang for athlesiure pants
13. To get to a location
14. Philadelphia slang for a submarine sandwich
15. The prizes and risks of a contest
16. Shocking and outrageous
17. What the Earth orbis
19. Abbriviation for 365 days
20. Sticky liquid from a tree
23. Title for member of the House (abbr.)
24. What 34 Across brings in May
26. Contract to keep a secret
29. Opposite of loud
30. What one does to a salad
33. Allow
34. Celestial events where debris burns in Earth's atmosphere
35. An atom or molecule with a negative or positive electric charge due to a change in number of electrons
36. Palendromic insurance compay
37. Snatch
41. Limu's species from Liberty Mutual commercials
42. Fortnite game mode
44. Particles of sand
50. To be behind the last defender in soccer
51. Genre of the film *Us*
52. A type of warm sock
53. Posts on X, formerly

Check Blueprint online for Crossword answers!

Down:

1. Past tense of is
2. ____ Garfunke, contributor to soundtrack of *The Graduate*
3. Roth _____. account to save money for retirement
4. "___ Tok," social media application
5. "Christmas ___," December 24
6. Final course when dining
7. Common area of injury for long distance runners
8. Opposite of lost
10. Vegan gelatin substitute
11. Metal containers
12. Mary ___, famous for her candy stores
18. Popular shipping company
20. File system acronym in computing
21. Last name of one of the greatest heavyweight boxers of all time
22. To record opinions
23. What a landlord collects
25. Scottish for "little"
26. 12 o'clock
27. American chain selling expensive footwear
28. Could describe a deployed sailor
30. Believed
31. Timeframe based on important events
32. Bureaucracy in charge of giving disability benefits
34. Card that allows one to use a mobile phone (abbr.)
37. To increase in size
38. The biggest little city in the world
39. In addition
40. To heat water to 212 degrees Farenheit
41. Garden where Genesis take place
43. Lemon___
45. Complement of column
46. Plural of is
47. Extreme anger
48. Homophone of how one ties their shoelaces
49. Official term for airbags in car (abbr.)

Photo of the Issue

Olivia Foster
Print Head Section Editor

U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Lafayette, Calif Non-Profit Org.
PERMIT No. 224
ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

1200 Pleasant Hill Rd Lafayette CA 94549